An Ecological Theology in the Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa? A Critical Theological Review.

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Declaration

By submitting this thesis electronically, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own, original work, that I am the sole author thereof (save to the extent explicitly otherwise stated), that reproduction and publication thereof by Stellenbosch University will not infringe any third party rights and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

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Abstract

The global Earth community finds itself in an unprecedented environmental crisis; a crisis that has been bought on by the actions of its human inhabitants. As humanity has evolved and grown, so has its societies and the way in which it views the world. This rapid growth and progress have however had a devastating impact on the whole Earth community. The power with which humanity enacts violence against the rest of creation has physically altered delicate balances that sustain life, effecting both human and non-human existence. Never has a single species had such an overwhelming effect on the Earth. These habits and practices are deeply embedded in beliefs and worldviews that have objectified the natural world as a recourse to be exploited for human gain.

These issues demand theological reflection. Many contributions in Ecotheology have been shared, but one could ask how the environmental crisis has been engaged from within a South African context? The environmental crisis is something that affects all of the Earth community; it not only has an effect on the natural world, but also on the livelihoods of people. It is therefore a concern that is relevant (and essential!) to local congregations.

This study will focus on the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) of South Africa and attempts to map the landscape of Ecotheology within the denomination. This is done by examining the theologies and worldviews that have had an impact in shaping the environmental crisis as we have it today. Then by engaging with the complexity of the South African context, the study situates the DRC by understanding environment in a holistic manner. Following this, the study focusses on the impact different metaphors and creative language can have on engaging with the environmental crisis.

The environmental crisis is an unparalleled test facing humanity. The human race has to honestly reflect on the scope of its destructive impact and drastically change its ways. Examining a well-established and institutional church in the South African context has the potential to awaken conversation and fresh contributions. Surveying the ecotheological landscape of the DRC can become part of a wider movement in society. The call to adopt alternative practices helps frame the rest of creation as more than just a recourse, but as good and part of God's great cosmic story.

Opsomming

Die hele Aardse gemeenskap bevind haarself in ‘n ongekende omgewingskrisis wat aan die voet van die mensdom se aksies gelê kan word. Soos die mensdom gegroei en ontwikkel het, het haar verstaan van die wêreld ook verander. Hierdie vinnige groei en vooruitgang het egter ‘n verwoestende impak op die hele Aarde gemeenskap. Die mag waarmee die mensdom geweld uitoefen teen die res van die skepping het die fyn balanse versteur wat noodsaaklik is om lewe onderhou. Hierdie versteurings het verreikend gevolge vir beide menslike en nie-menslike lewe hier op Aarde. Nog nooit het een spesie so ‘n oorweldigende effek op die Aarde gehad nie. Hierdie ongesonde gewoontes en praktyke is ten diepste verweef met oortuigings en wêreldbeskouinge wat die natuurlike wêreld sien as net ‘n hulpbron vir menslike gewin.

Hierdie kwessies verg teologiese refleksie. Baie bydraes is al in ekoteologie gelewer, maar mens sou kon afvra hoe die kwessie al aangespreek is binne die Suid-Afrikaanse konteks? Die omgewingskrisis is iets wat die hele Aardse gemeenskap beïnvloed en ‘n impak het op die gesondheid van beide die natuur en menslike gemeenskappe. Dit is dus ‘n uitdaging wat relevant (en noodsaaklik!) is tot plaaslike gemeenskappe.

Hierdie studie fokus spesifiek op die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk (NGK) van Suid-Afrika en poog om die landskap van ekoteologie te skets binne die denominasie. Hierdie taak word gedoen deur die teologie en wêreldbeskouings te bestudeer wat die omgewingskrisis gevorm het soos ons dit vandag beleef. Daarna word die kompleksiteit van die Suid-Afrikaanse konteks benader deur ‘n holistiese verstaan van omgewing te inkorporeer en hoe die NGK in hierdie konteks inpas. Hierna fokus die studie op die moontlike impak wat verskillende metafore en kreatiewe taal kan hê op die mens se teologiese nadenke oor die omgewingskrisis.

Die uitdaging wat die mensdom in die gesig staar met die omgewingskrisis is ongekend. Die mensdom word geroep om eerlik te reflekteer oor hul verwoestende dade en drasties begin om aanpassings te maak. Die hoop is dat nuwe gesprekke en bydraes gestimuleer kan word deur ‘n gevestigde kerk in die Suid-Afrikaanse konteks te ondersoek. Hierdie nadenke kan gesien word as deel van ‘n wyer beweging wat die skepping nie net sien as ‘n hulpbron nie, maar as deel van God se groot kosmiese narratief.

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To the "Green Team": Thank you that we can figure this out and be transformed together.

Dedication

I dedicate this work to all who have sacrificed their lives in a pursuit of a more just world for the entire created community.

I also pledge myself as part of the chorus of prophetic voices in a global outcry for an alternative and more sustainable human existence; an existence that includes the whole of creation in Christ's upside-down reality.

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Chapter 1: Introduction and methodology

1.1. Research problem

1.1.1. The global environmental crisis in the 21st century

In recent years the global environmental crisis[1] has enjoyed increased attention in the public sphere, with concerns about the changing environment becoming a common sight in mainstream media and political debates. With the dawn of social media and new information technologies, the world seems more connected than ever before; aiding in the spreading of awareness and information on a global scale. A growing movement by individuals, companies and public figures has opened the door to an alternative approach to viewing nature, in what Taylor (2010:214) refers to as the "sustainability revolution". In recent light a whole new wave of youth climate activists are gaining media attention for challenging older generations in a call to come forward and take responsibility for the well-being of future generations (Bowman, 2020:298). These young voices have brought the conversation into the public discourse. Their approach is not conventional; addressing the issue as one of global justice and confronting much more people with the realities of the environmental crisis than before (Marris, 2019:472).

In answer to growing social challenges, a new ecological theology (or ecotheology) has awoken, labelled by Conradie (2005:1) as a next wave of contextual theology. This theology seeks to address the environmental crisis and the overwhelming effects thereof on all human and non-human life. The importance of this crisis cannot be overstated. The environmental crisis is not just another problem that humanity needs to deal with, rather it asks of us to completely change the way we live (McFague, 2008:44). According to the Accra Confession the environmental crisis is directly related to the development of an industrial economic system and globalization which has resulted in devastating injustice towards those on the periphery (WARC,

[1] This study will use the term environmental crisis. The environmental crisis refers to the whole scope of issues when it comes to human and Earth relations. It includes air pollution, ground erosion, water pollution, deforestation and many other environmental issues. Terms such as climate crisis or global warming don't focus on the full spectrum of the crisis and is thus distinguished from the collective Environmental crisis in this study. The term environment also refers to the immediate surroundings of humans and other created beings. Using this term widens the scope to include the interconnectedness of the crisis between human and non-human entities.

2005:para. 9). The current system objectifies creation's (and human) worth solely to an economic resource exploited for gain, without any regard for the consequences (Berry, 2009:113). This approach is not sustainable and never has been; there are far-reaching consequences and a price to be paid. Diefenbacher (2011:79) writes that though humanity might not feel like we're paying that price now, the bill will most certainly be presented to future generations. Yet, documents like the Accra Confession reminds us that there are already those who pay the price.

The constant human need and drive to develop has left humanity with a traumatised Earth, and vast social and economic human inequality (Boff, 1997:8). The result is not only a pillaged Earth, but human beings left forgotten on the fringes of society – hoping on the economic and political system to liberate them from desperate living conditions. A new paradigm is needed to reinstate the dignity of people and the whole of creation. Writing about development and ecology, De Gruchy (2015:141) states: "We cannot solve poverty through the same industrial economy that is destroying the earth […] how can the system that generates the conditions of poverty be seen as a solution to poverty?" (De Gruchy, 2015:141). Boff (1997:4) echoes this when he writes that ecology has moved beyond its early stage as a green movement and has become a radical critique of the civilisation we have built.

Even if human individuals don't intend to enact power over creation, the systems, cultures and habits we create do it for us, distancing humans from any conscious or deliberate acts against nature (Rasmussen, 2013:98). The issues that perpetuate this continual cycle of abuse are deep-rooted complex problems and therefore deserve a thorough understanding of the structures and systems that uphold it. Some like Northcott (2013:45) eludes to a deep underlying dualism that is embodied by a modern understanding of the world. This understanding that separates different powers and creates new divisions between nature and culture (Northcott, 2013:45). Northcott continues: "To be modern is to deny that there is a God who is the author of nature and culture, for in the separation of nature from culture the moderns feel that they are invincible" (Nothcortt, 2013:46). This feeling of invincibility has led to unprecedented violence against nature, threatening the existence of all species, bringing out the worst side of humans. Boff addresses the scope of this by stating that humans have become the true satan of the Earth (Boff, 1997:19). When the scope of the crisis seems so far-reaching, what has been the role of the church in addressing the problem?

1.1.2. The church and climate crisis

Authors like Boff (1997:81) are convinced that the root-problem seems to be the disruption of a universal connectedness. Berry (2009:49) also states that this problem will never be truly addressed until humans accept their true place in the universe and acknowledge that all of creation on Earth has a right to live and thrive. The church of today has a responsibility to guide people in the rediscovery of this connectedness. Many however do not see the church as part of the solution, but rather as the main culprit of the environmental crisis as we know it (Migliore, 2004:93). For years the message of the Bible has been misused as a basis to enact total domination of humankind over all of the natural world. This anthropocentric[2] worldview believes that all of creation has been made only for the sake of humans as the "crown of creation". When reflecting on the nature of a Christian theology of ecology, Moltmann (1993:31) highlights the flaw in this way of thinking: "[…] it is unbiblical; for according to the biblical Jewish and Christian traditions, God created the world for his glory, out of love; and the crown of creation is not the human being, it is the sabbath" (Moltmann, 1993:31).

In an individualistic (Western) society, it is easy to solely focus on the salvation of humankind and forget about the rest of creation. Within the Protestant tradition there has been a long-standing tendency to only see creation as the backdrop for human salvation (Conradie, 2012b:11). This has been a key theme in the conversation on an ecotheology, with Conradie (2012b:7) summarising it with the question: How is the Earth to be saved? Within the South African context this is an important question to address, because it determines how believers act, think and feel about the rest of creation.

With humankind taking centre stage and dictating the course of history, the voices of the rest of creation have not fully been noted. The church can challenge this kind of thinking by recognising that our value rests in the larger community in which humankind comes into being (Berry, 2009:47). Humans are dependent on rest of creation for life, yet human actions have been selfish and set the stage for potential

[2] According to Merriam-Webster online dictionary Anthropocentric can be defined as the idea that human beings are the most significant entities in the universe (Merriam-Webster, 2020).

catastrophe. In these times, the church has the responsibility to speak up – the church has something to say. De Gruchy writes:

> [..] the role of the church is to preach the gospel, and if the gospel has anything worth saying to the world at this time, then it must be the good news about how we get out of this mess. […] then it has to be this: grace, hope, opportunity and new possibilities. Good news. Gospel (De Gruchy, 2015:139).

As bearers of the good news, the church brings an alternative voice and needs to take up a role of responsibility and moral guidance in addressing the environmental crisis. Berry believes the role of the church is in 21st century is to guide humanity out of a state of denial when it comes to the climate crisis and into a whole new era (Berry, 2009:47).[3] Change however is hard work and the task ahead is probably the most discouraging task human beings have ever undertaken (McFague, 2008:28). A lot needs to be done in leading people into a new way of thinking and living. Talking about the role of public theology in addressing the issue, Deane-Drummond and Bedford-Strohm (2011:3) write that although there is a considerable theoretical awareness internationally about the ecological crisis, there seems to be a gap between people's knowledge and their actions.

Thus, it is not just important what people say or believe; it's also an issue of action and lifestyle.[4] Framing the church's role in this way, makes it an ethical issue. Rasmussen elevates the morality of everyday life by emphasising the interconnectedness and interdependence of all created things, stating little falls outside the ethic we need when it comes to an Earth-honouring religion (Rasmussen, 2013:126). It's in times of change that the church has the capacity to lead people in creative leadership. Rasmussen (2013:364) underscores that there is already a myriad of deep, shared traditions and practices in the history of the Christian faith that can help us bring resilient and life affirming change.

It's also important to note in the words of Dirkie Smit that "the expression "church" can mean different things to different people" (Smit, 2007:61). Smit (2007:61-72) unpacks

[3] Berry describes that the Earth is shifting from its current era (called the Cenozoic) to a new era he calls the Ecozoic era, "a period when humans would be present to the planet in a mutually enhancing manner (Berry, 2009:47)."

[4] In the Bible, the book of James highlights the pitfall of a faith that only stops with belief and is not transformed into action.

this by broadly outlining three different ways (or groupings) in which being church can be understood, namely: the local congregation; the institutional-, denominational- and ecumenical church; and the church as believers (or as salt and light in the world). Whilst engaging the environmental crisis and the role of the church, it must be noted that focussing on a different aspect of what constitutes being church could heed different insights and conclusions. Though each play an important role the focus of this study revolves more around the denominational aspects of being church in South Africa.[5]

1.1.3. Church, society and environment in South Africa

South Africa has a complex history and the injustice of apartheid has left deep wounds that are still present today, having a big impact on how we live and do theology. Reflecting on the history of church in South Africa, De Gruchy (1986:199) notices the theme of the kingdom of God as a key aspect of the church's struggle in the past. This is epitomised by an eschatological faith that is in response to the new age that has dawned in Christ, sharing in God's plan and anticipating God's ultimate purpose for the world (De Gruchy, 1986:203). This is what the church is still called for today, to act and believe within the reality of this kingdom. This means that the Good News, is not good news if it does not address the needs of the poor, the captive and forgotten (De Gruchy, 1986:203). While the church has fought for political liberation during apartheid, the focus has now changed to economic liberation (Conradie *et.al.*, 2001:137).

Writing about practical approaches to addressing the environmental crisis, Conradie and Field highlight that the country is crippled under vast poverty, unemployment, lack of education, housing, inadequate health- and public services, crime, corruption and the AIDS pandemic (Conradie & Field, 2016:14). They continue by emphasising the complexity and inter-relatedness of the relationship between politics, economy, society and the environment which needs to be taken into account when one plans to address the issue of the environmental crisis locally (Conradie & Field, 2016:29). Key to this point is to understand that environment means different things to different

[5] This study forms part of a larger project. Thus, a deeper focus is given on the denomination, institutional and ecumenical understandings of church. The aim is to address more local church and believer centered perspectives in the following studies.

people and is not just concerned with nature conservation (Conradie *et.al.*, 2001:137). It impacts countless people's lives in many different ways and constitutes a complex collection of forces impacting the lives and physical environment of everyone.

De Gruchy (2007:335) underscores that one cannot do ecotheology in South Africa without adhering to this interplay between economy and ecology. He calls for a combined approach, uniting the economic (referred to as the brown agenda) with the ecological (referred to as the green agenda) in what he calls an Olive Agenda (De Gruchy, 2007:335). What is important about this way of thinking is that it tries to create an integrated approach when addressing the environmental crisis in local communities: "We need to integrate economics with ecology, peace with justice, health with prosperity and democracy with tolerance" (De Gruchy, 2015:224). We cannot speak of what Rasmussen (2013) refers to as an Earth-honouring faith, if we don't take an integrated approach and hear the voices of all created beings on the periphery; humans and non-humans.

Engaging with issues of injustice and power it might be helpful to note the contributions of the Uniting Reformed Church of South Africa (URCSA) in addressing the environmental crisis. In an article outlining URCSA's ecological journey Plaatjie-Van Huffel, highlights key moments in the churches' involvement with the crisis at local and international level (Plaatjie-Van Huffel, 2018:1). One of the main points is the Church's dialogue with the Accra Confession and the collaboration with the Evangelical Reformed Church in Germany (ERCG) which culminated in the creation of a work entitled *Dreaming a Different World: Globalization and Justice for Humanity and the Earth* (2010). Writing on this collaboration Smit underscores the engagement with key themes of empire, power and injustice within the Accra Confession and *Dreaming a Different World* (Smit: 2013:90). This reflection helps to underscore that when engaging the environmental crisis, it is important to not only become aware of how power and injustice manifests, but to envision an alternative (Smit, 2013:90).

Many South Africans live in a constant struggle to survive and provide for their families. For many the situation has worsened in recent times due to drought. The country has witnessed one of the worst draughts in its history resulting in a serious shortage of water in rural and urban communities. This has challenged people's lives but also many perceptions of believers and how they understand the promise of God's

providence. Marais (2017:69) writes about the impact the draught and water crisis has had on the way Christians understand the symbolic meaning of water in the Bible. Focussing on John 4, she emphasises the role of imagination in these times, underlining the promise of ecological and human flourishing as the true living water (Marais, 2017:81). Feeling the vulnerability of unprecedented natural occurrences, many South Africans have gained a more acute awareness of the changing environment. There are many organisations and church communities doing great work in aiding South Africans to address the issues of the environmental crisis.[6] The work that these organisations do is invaluable to the cause for ecological justice and the change that is needed to stop the effects of the environmental crisis. Despite this, many faith communities and traditions still lag behind; not seeing any discourse on environment issues as a priority. This continues to be a cause for deep concern.

1.1.4. The Dutch Reformed Church's ecological journey

The Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) is the oldest formal church denomination in South Africa. When the Dutch East Indian Company arrived at the Cape in 1652 to establish a vital trading post to the East, they also introduced their faith to the country (De Gruchy, 1986:1). Most of the company's employees where members of the Dutch Reformed Church, and thus the church grew as the influence of the colony spread. As the oldest formal church structure in the country, the DRC has a proud but mostly tainted history; known to the world as the Church that officially supported and theologically defended state sanctioned separation of races in South Africa called apartheid. The effects of apartheid have been far reaching and still present today, with the social-economic inequality and injustices of the past still manifesting in communities today. The 26 years after the fall of apartheid has been spent dealing with this complex theological heritage and discerning how the church finds its way in a post-apartheid society in a just manner. In recent years the church has been asking

[6] In keeping with wider green movement in society, many churches and organisations have risen to embody a new theological awareness of the environment. In the Southern African context organisations such as the Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute (SAFCEI), A Rocha, Farming God's Way and the Green Anglicans have taken up the mantel of embracing a more holistic and embodied approach to address the environmental crisis. These organisations and many other often embody a spirit of cooperation and an inter-faith approach to inform and mobilise people on ground level, while also focus on actively engaging with governments on changing legislation and policies.

what it means to be church in a changing and modern world; focusing strongly in changing the core ethos of the church into a missional faith (Niemandt *et.al.*, 2018:1).

During this time much has been said and written within the denomination about the environmental crisis. Representatives of the church have been involved in addressing numerous environmental issues, with the General Synod accepting a framework for addressing the environmental crisis in 2013. Titled “Ter wille van die aarde en haar bewoners” the framework urges congregations to engage with the environmental issues and seek to be an ecumenical and prophetic voice in fighting the environmental crisis (NGK-AS Agenda, 2013:217). Despite the acceptance of this framework and hard work of various task teams and individuals; dialogue on issues of environmental crisis has not enjoyed the attention it deserves. This however changed in 2019 and can best be observed with the 48th quadrennial gathering of the Wes-Kaapland Synod.[7] With the backdrop of the ongoing drought and water scarcity nationwide, environmental issues enjoyed three sessions over the week.[8] The year 2019 was labelled as a Kairos year for addressing the environmental crisis by the joint DRC/URCSA Witness Ministry, citing the next 11 years as crucial if anything is to be done (Botha: 2019:17). It seems as through the effects of drought in rural and agricultural communities, combined with the threat of water shortage in urban regions, has in some ways brought the conversation to the foreground. For the first time the discussion around the environmental crisis is enjoying the attention within the DRC it urgently needs. One could see this as an important shift. The DRC is in a unique position as an established denomination and able use its privilege and influence to really guide congregants to live differently. The church has the means to truly be forerunners in establishing a deeper green movement and faith in South Africa. However, the complexity of this should not be underestimated.

[7] The 48th meeting of the Wes-Kaapland synod took place from 13-17 May 2019 at the ATKV Goudini Spa resort in Rawsonville. The complete agenda can be accessed at: http://www.kerkargief.co.za/doks/acta/WK_Agenda_2019.pdf.

[8] These three sessions opened up dialogue on the subject to not only church leaders, but also stressed the importance of having discussions about the environmental crisis and the effects thereof, at local level. These points also enjoyed attention at the 17th meeting of the General Synod that same year, where leaders and representatives met from across the whole country.

1.1.5. The problem

To several the problem seems daunting and overwhelming; many don't even know where to start (Conradie, 2011a:11). Much has already been said around the environmental crisis in South Africa, but not much has been done. Up to this point the discussion around the environmental crisis within the DRC has mainly centred around embracing alternative practices for the sake of saving the Earth – and ourselves – from environmental catastrophe. The locus of the conversation has been solely reduced to a matter of environmental ethics. Conradie (2005:2) warns that there is a danger that the environmental crisis could just become yet another concern on an already crowded agenda of local churches. He writes that instead the entire life and praxis of the church should include an ecological dimension and vision (Conradie, 2005:2).

The issue of environmental crisis and ecotheology in the DRC is a deeply embedded one, that means addressing core theological beliefs and practices. It calls for an eco-theological reform of some sorts. The DRC is in need of a good Reformed theological framework from which to address key misconceptions and understandings in the Christian faith over the centuries. This study attempts to start such a contribution by conducting a thorough survey of current DRC and other relevant Reformed theologies related to this topic in order to help guide such a conversation.

1.2. Research questions

1.2.1. Primary research question

What is the current landscape of an ecological theology within the Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa?

1.2.2. Secondary research questions

a) What are the main theological streams in the Reformed tradition when it comes to an ecological theology and what has its impact been on the theology within the Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa?
b) Who are some of the main theological voices present in the discussion over the environmental crisis and the church's role in the South African context?

c) What impact does the socio-economic context in South Africa have on the discussion around ecological ethics and the environmental crisis?
d) What shortcomings, inadequacies, and opportunities, are identifiable through a critical theological reflection on the current state of DRC ecotheologies?

1.3. Methodology

This study will be done in the field of systematic theology, with a precise focus on ecological ethics which will be done in the form of a qualitative literature review. The aim is to primarily establish an understanding of the main theological voices when it comes to an ecotheology within the Reformed tradition. This will aid in understanding the formation of the ecological theology that exists within the denomination today. Understanding the theological lines that run through the church's embodied faith can help guide and focus an approach to addressing the issue of the environmental crisis in the DRC in current times.

Building on this framework the study will then shift its focus towards the South African context and ethical implications of a grounded ecotheology. Doing this will aid in creating a holistic and sober understanding of the South African context and the unique challenges facing South Africans at grassroot level. By taking this approach the DRC is not seen in isolation, but as an organism embedded in its surrounding context. Understanding the different powers at play and how that influences lives of South Africans at local level is of key importance if any response is to be formulated to address the environmental crisis.

After coming to better understanding of the DRC in the South African context, the study will critically reflect on the current landscape of ecotheologies in the DRC by approaching it from a denominational perspective. Culminating in a detailed discussion on shortcomings, weaknesses and possibilities, the study will aim to propose opportunities and potential pitfalls that may need to be noted for further discussion and research.

1.4. Proposed structure and literary review

As stated above this study takes the form of a literature review. At this point it might be important to highlight some key sources that can give form to this research task, as well as how these sources will be utilised in each chapter respectively.

1.4.1. Chapter 1

The first chapter introduces the topic of the study and outlines the proposed argument and methodology. It introduces the reader to the themes and terminology used in the study and gives an outline, framing the issue of the environmental crisis in the South African context.

1.4.2. Chapter 2

Initially, the study will use key texts such as *Creation and Salvation, Volume 1* (Conradie, 2012a), *God in Creation* (Moltmann, 1993) and *The Travail of Nature* (Santmire, 1985) to introduce the main streams of ecological theology, creating an introductory foundation to start the conversation about an ecological- and creation theology in broad strokes. The goal of this chapter is to introduce and debunk what is meant by ecotheology, the development thereof and how that could have possibly shaped certain theological beliefs and ethics within the Reformed tradition and the DRC in particular.

1.4.3. Chapter 3

This chapter brings into tension the conversation about environmental crisis with the social and economic realities of South Africa. Texts such as *An Ecological Christian Anthropology* (Conradie, 2005) and *Christianity and Earthkeeping* (Conradie, 2011a) are key texts. Conradie's work will be used in conversation with a theology of development, focussing on *Keeping Body and Soul Together* (De Gruchy, 2015) and particularly on his work on the Olive Agenda (De Gruchy, 2007), to bring the discussion in direct dialogue with grassroot level concerns of South Africans. Also inviting other authors such as Gottfried (1995) and Northcott (2013) in the discussion around the economic and political side of the issue worldwide, might aid in understanding the interplay between different powers in society. These sources will balance the ethical

perspective on what an ecotheology might mean in the local context, while being rooted in the real issues South Africans face on a daily basis.

1.4.4. Chapter 4

Chapter 4 focusses on different sources and traditions that can aid the DRC in its journey towards an ecological reform of its theology. Sources on other traditions and perspectives include Berry (2009), Boff (1997), McFague (2008) and Taylor (2010) as reference points for a wider discussion and understanding of ecological spirituality and ethics. Further incorporating work done by Greyvenstein (2018) will invite eco-feminist perspectives on embodiment and agency into this body of research. These and other sources can help create a wider lens on approaches and understandings around the environmental crisis.

1.4.5. Chapter 5

This chapter attempts to bring together the study and presenting its findings. The study will conclude in an exposition of further research possibilities as well as possible pitfalls and shortcomings going forward. The relevance of the study and what contributions can be made will be outlined in this chapter.

1.5. Relevance and contribution

Issues surrounding the environmental crisis are more relevant than ever. Humanity is realising more and more that the crisis is not just something that will disappear without decisive intervention. In this important time in the history of Earth, the church is called to encourage responsible engagement with this crisis, urging fellow believers to embrace alternative lifestyles and solutions.

This study aims to help the DRC on this journey to engage the matter in a meaningful way. The goal is to serve the church with an outline of the key themes and voices in the conversation around environmental ethics and spirituality. This can in turn help lead the church into a deep rediscovery of own theology and praxis; instilling a new and invigorated ownership when engaging with the environmental crisis. The hope is that discussion can engage leaders to take the threat of the ecological crisis seriously and ask meaningful questions on the involvement of the local church in addressing this crisis.

While this study will be a body of research that makes its own unique contribution, the goal is to construct a foundation for a doctorate project to follow. It is intended that this study will help to sketch the theological landscape in a clear, critical, and constructive manner. In this way providing a sound theological platform on which to do further research at doctoral level that can help the DRC to address some of the shortcomings, challenges, and opportunities for developing and disseminating a contemporary ecotheology for our context.

1.6. Limitations

Firstly, this study aims to focus on the Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa. The goal of this research is not to focus on an ecotheology of churches in South Africa as a whole. Although themes and theological terms will be addressed that overlap the concerns and theologies of other faith traditions, the focus of this study remains on the DRC and Christian Reformed tradition. As the problem owner and sponsor of this study, the ultimate goal is to aid Western Cape synod – more specifically the Synodal Task Team for Doctrine and Current Affairs and the Ecology project team – to address the issue of environmental crisis on synodical and congregational level.[9] It must therefore be noted that the study will take place from a Reformed theological perspective and in service of the DRC. It is also important to note that the DRC is in itself not a homogeneous collection of faith communities. This study is not able to create universal outcomes, but rather tries to address key issues and themes (at denominational level) in the discussion that in turn may be relevant when it comes to the addressing of the issues in local congregations.

Secondly, this study does not wish to contribute a detailed outline of how ‘good’ or ‘perfect’ ecotheology will look like in the DRC. Rather, this research aims to gain a deeper understanding of what research has already been done in the field of ecological theology and ethics. In doing so, to articulate the landscape of sources and themes that make up the conversation on ecotheology and ethics. As mentioned

[9] It must be noted that though the research is supported by the Western Cape synod (by means of bursary), the ultimate focus of the study falls on the DRC in general and discusses decisions and reports by the General Synod. Much can be said about the Western Cape Synod’s engagement with environmental and ecotheological issues, but this falls outside the purview of this current study. The researcher’s involvement as leader of the joint DRC/URCSA Witness Ministry’s Ecology Project Team (also known as the Green Team) should also be mentioned here for transparency. It must be stated that this has not influenced the outcome of this study.

above, the study aims to use the outcomes of this research as a sound platform on which to develop a further doctoral study in aid of the DRC.

Lastly, this study takes the form of a qualitative literature review and therefore the aim is not to empirically prove or design a solution or recommendation to the problem owner. The goal is rather to gather understanding and identify opportunities and possibilities for further studies. No empirical research will be done, instead this study will focus on creating a good theological and theoretical basis for further studies in the field.

Chapter 2: A critical, historical reflection on a selection of noteworthy works in creation theology.

2.1. Introduction

This chapter will serve as an introduction to the main terminology and themes present in conceptualising an ecological theology (henceforth referred to as ecotheology). The aim of this chapter is to firstly define what this study means when referring to ecotheology and how that relates to studies of other associated fields such as creation- and natural theology.[10] This will be done by examining a variety of ecotheological sources. Gathering different perspectives from a diversity of contributions will aid the study to hone in on common themes and understandings found over a wide scope of ecotheologies.

Following this clarification, the chapter will move to investigate some early origins of the ecotheological movement. What are the possible origins of this discipline? Who have made notable contributions to its development? What are some of the important themes and theologies that have shaped the historical development of ecotheology? These are all important questions that guide this chapter. The method for doing this will be to deeper delve into contributions of creation theology, which can be argued to be an early precursor and foundational to the development contemporary ecotheology. These authors and themes have been chosen for two main reasons. Firstly, the level and frequency with which authors have engaged with these contributions in contemporary ecotheology. Secondly, the way in which these authors and themes address important theologies and ideologies that where prominent in their respective times. Using these two guidelines as benchmark helps create a general overview of the development of thought and the impact of such contributions on ecotheology as we know it today.

Navigating this historical overview, contributions from the Reformed tradition will help guide the investigation to aid in deducing some potential mile markers of the DRC's theological heritage, framing their ecotheological journey. By taking this approach the

[10] It can be noted that within the discussion of ecotheology within the DRC, natural theology can also be discussed as an important theological stream in the denominational heritage. The idea is to address this aspect in subsequent studies.

study places the development of an ecotheology into context and helps the reader understand the complex nuances and underpinnings of contemporary ecotheology.

2.2. Defining ecotheology

2.2.1. A brief discussion on possible origins of ecotheology

In his book *Early Ecotheology and Joseph Sittler*, Finish environmental theologian Panu Pihkala (2017) dedicates the first chapter solely to introducing and defining what his study understands to be ecotheology. Pihkala (2017:16) writes that one central theme in Christian ecotheology has been Lynn White's thesis. Lynn White's thesis refers to White's article that was published in 1967 titled "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis". White's article is viewed by many as a core text in ecotheology and an important starting point in addressing the root causes of the environmental crisis (Santmire, 1985:1).

In the article White (1967:1207) traces the origins of the modern environmental crisis to the merging of technology and science in the Western medieval world – which finds its underpinnings in Christian attitudes and axioms. White (1967:1207) underscores the role dualistic worldviews have played within orthodox Christianity and how that has contributed to the environmental crisis. He writes that the growth of the environmental crisis "cannot be understood historically apart from distinctive attitudes toward nature which are deeply grounded in Christian dogma" (White, 1967:1207). Though widely critiqued by many, White's contribution is a valuable source to many others. It highlights the flawed misunderstandings of human-earth relations that have dominated in aspects and worldviews of many Western Christianities. Furthermore, it calls out a strong dualistic and anthropocentric tradition that cannot be separated from the current environmental crisis – emphasising that Christianity bears a "huge burden of guilt" for its role in the environmental crisis (White, 1967:1206).[11]

[11] It is at this point where White's work draws sharp criticism. Though Christianity's role in the environmental crisis cannot be overstated, White assumes that Christianity is inherently destructive towards nature and that this is imbedded in the core message of Christian life and faith. Though it is true that for many years nature has only been seen as a stage for human salvation within protestant theology (Conradie, 2012b:11), any good ecotheology will alert to the shortcomings of such an argument. Moltmann writes that according to such an anthropocentric worldview all of creation was made for the sake of human beings (Moltmann, 1993:31). He however continues to state that this is simply not true and though he believes humans to have a special position in creation (as image of God),

Though some hail White's work as a seminal moment in the conceptualisation of ecotheology, Pihkala disagrees that this can be understood as the starting point. Though there was a rise in environmental awareness in the late 1960's, Pihkala (2017:19) argues that the roots of ecotheology run much deeper and can trace its beginnings further back to the early 1900's. He believes that the ecological movement in the late 1960's was more of a sociological movement than a theological one (Pihkala, 2017:20), writing that Joseph Sittler and others are a part of what he calls Early Ecotheology. This approach brings into questions the origin of ecotheology and how we understand it in light of the environmental crisis today.

Authors like Deane-Drummond broadly situate ecotheology as a particular expression of contextual theology "that emerges in the particular contemporary context of environmental awareness that has characterised the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries" (Deane-Drummond, 2008:X). Pihkala (2017:23) however criticises this approach by stating that although this holds true for later ecotheology, the field is not only older and wider than traditionally defined, but also that the essence of ecotheological reflection is linked to fundamental theological questions. According to Pihkala (2017:23) contextual theology does not fully encapsulate this connection. Understanding ecotheology in this way opens up the field and connects it to older traditions and contributions on the environment, nature and creation. Therefore, linking ecotheological reflections to older traditions such as creation theology.

Although one might find deeper connections between ecotheology and studies in creation or natural theology for example; it remains important to distinguish between these different fields. Though works from these fields can be understood as contributions in ecotheology, one must still define ecotheology in its contemporary usage as a relative new field of study, only rising into prominence in the past few decades. Rooting this field in older and more established reflections does however form sturdy foundation for reflection and makes available a collection of works that aid in addressing and reflecting theologically on the environmental crisis today.

humanity stand together with all other created beings – without human beings the heavens still declare the glory of God (Moltmann, 1993:31).

2.2.2. Possible elements of a Christian ecotheology

It can be argued that one could associate ecotheology with different elements that incorporates different theological streams, religious traditions, cultures and approaches.[12] Conradie (2006:121-139) tries to do this in some manner by examining different models of an ecological Christian theology. By examining the work of Haught, Conradie divides ecotheologies into three models: apologetic (2006:121), sacramental (2006:133) and eschatological (2006:135). To get a more wider understanding of different elements of ecotheology, Conradie in later work divides ecotheology into eight distinct discourses: 1) multi-faith discourse on religion and ecology; 2) ecumenical discourse on ecojustice; 3) numerous contributions to applied ethics; 4) discourse on ecological biblical hermeneutics; 5) reconstructive work on ecological ambiguities and wisdoms embedded in specific Christian traditions; 6) theological reflection on Christian belief and symbols; 7) theological reflection on liturgical renewal and 8) reflections on a variety of earth keeping projects and the greening of Christian institutions (Conradie, 2012b:7-8).

These discourses have not developed within a vacuum. Having a clearer understanding of its development and core themes might aid this study going forward. Conradie (2005) argues in his book *An Ecological Christian Anthropology* that the goal of ecotheology is twofold:

> Ecological theology is an attempt to retrieve the ecological wisdom in Christianity as a response to environmental threats and injustices. At the same time, it is an attempt to reinvestigate, rediscover and renew the Christian traditions in light of challenges posed by the environmental crisis (Conradie, 2005:1).

Thus, Conradie grounds ecotheology as a response to the environmental crisis itself, while emphasising the need to reflect and rediscover older Christian traditions. For Conradie (2005:2) reform in Christian doctrine is needed which engages how humans understand their place within the earth community. The challenge is therefore to engage with the current environmental crisis while also looking to the past to aid in addressing these problems theologically. Conradie (2005:5) continues by engaging

[12] Creation theology, natural theology, green theology and environmental theology to name a few.

the work of McFague, highlighting reflections on human interaction with space. Important elements of this engagement ask questions about humanity's response toward widespread alienation from nature, offers critique against anthropocentrism, whilst resists the tendency to legitimise dominium over the rest of the Earth community (Conradie, 2005:5).

Taking these discourses into account, this study would like to propose three key elements from the scope of ecotheologies to help define central themes or elements that transgress the different discourses of the field of study. These three elements encompass different concerns and approaches within Christian ecotheology that in some ways contribute to the wider framework of the discipline. This is by no means a comprehensive definition; these elements have been chosen in the hopes of sketching the landscape of ecotheology in broad strokes for the sake of more clarity in this study. Others might argue differently in light of other studies or approaches.

Firstly, *ecotheology tries to understand the historical events, beliefs and traditions that has given rise to the current environmental crisis*. This is a historical systematic task of understanding key theologies and philosophies within its context that has created and formed the current predominant worldview (i.e., framing nature as solely an economic recourse for human gain and development). This element engages with traditions such as creation and nature theology. When reflecting on the need for a new theology of nature, Santmire (1985:8) warns of the potential danger of not engaging past studies and contributions in the field. For him the danger is that researchers and scholars will continue to make seemingly new contributions without acknowledging the work that have been done before them or account for the strengths and weaknesses of more than two millennia of theological reflection that have gone before them (Santmire, 1985:8).

One cannot make a valid contribution without understanding the roots of the current crisis, or without taking into account what has already been said on the subject. This study wants to argue that part of this is understanding the relevance of key theological terms and concepts prominent in the discussion such as: dualism, transcendence, soteriology and dominium. It also calls for a deeper understanding of important stages and periods in the story of modern human history – like Gnosticism, Enlightenment,

Industrialisation, Modernisation, Capitalism and Consumerism to name a few – and how the theologies of the day have moulded current theological views.

Secondly, *ecotheology centres around age old theological questions about relationships between God, humans and creation*. Deane-Drummond (2008:XII) writes that ecotheology seeks to uncover the basis for a proper relationship between God, humanity and the cosmos. Pihkala echo's this: "Ecotheology deals with questions of the proper relationship between humans and the rest of nature in the light of Christian beliefs, and the study of ecotheology analyses different views of these relationships" (Pihkala, 2017:14). In many cases this takes the form of a more ethical approach, concerned with the effects of human relationships and how power manifests within them. Conradie (2005:1) writes that environmental ethics should however not be reduced to a sub-discipline of Christian ethics but that an ecological ethics should rather touch on almost all aspects of life.

Ecotheology asks difficult and confronting questions about human life and relations as part of the whole of creation. For Conradie Anthropology forms the crux of ecotheologies. Referring to Granberg-Michaelson, he writes: "The environmental crisis calls for urgent reflection on the relationship between humanity and nature, or, more precisely, on *the place of humanity within the earth community*" (Conradie, 2005:2). For long anthropology centred around an individualistic understanding of human beings before God. Recent changes in science – and an important part of ecotheology – is the conceptualising of an ecological anthropology that sees humans as interconnected with all other living things (McFague, 2008:48). Humanity is embedded in the rest of creation and cannot exist apart from it (Rasmussen, 2013:12). Therefore, one could argue that there is a focus on the interconnectedness and interdependence of all created things. It's also within this paradigm that many reflect on the presence of God in the world and even argues the presence of the world in God (Moltmann, 1985:13).

Thirdly, *ecotheology – in some way or another – is concerned with the current context of the environmental crisis*. As already mentioned above, ecotheology can in no way be limited to a contextual theology. However, all ecotheology is in some way concerned with the present state of environmental decay and strives to uncover positive alternatives to existing unhealth paradigms. This element can partly be

approached from a public theological perspective. When writing about how public theology addresses violence against nature, Bedford-Strohm (2011:49) writes that the first task of a public ecotheology is to reclaim its own traditions. He writes that Biblical texts that have been used in the past as justification for the exploitation of nature is a part of cultural memory and "have deeply influenced Western culture" and is therefore a task of public relevance (Bedford-Strohm, 2011:49). Reclaiming the biblical narrative that humans are created as an embedded part of nature must therefore be part of this concern with environmental devastation in contemporary society.

2.2.3. In summary

Thus far this study has defined ecotheology as a relative new discipline that has deeper roots in older traditions. The discipline asks important questions about faith and humanity's role on Earth, whilst also reflecting on questions that are central to addressing the environmental crisis. Ecotheology encapsulates a diversity of fields and approaches but share some common goals like understanding past theological themes and contributions, whilst asking how humans can justly live in communion with all of creation. Ecotheology not only strives to understand the roots and causes of the modern-day environmental crisis but challenges these perceptions in order to write an alternative narrative. Therefore, this study needs to gain a deeper understanding of works that can possibly engage theological thought on human's place in creation – as creatures that have been created in the image of God. This will be done by reflecting on some figures that one could argue have given noteworthy historical contributions in the work in creation theology.

2.3. A selection of noteworthy contributions in creation theology

It must be noted that the purpose of this chapter is not to give a complete or holistic overview of the development of creation theology; the works of authors such as Conradie (2012a), Moltmann (1985 & 1993), Santmire (1985) and others have made more complete and detailed contributions than this study allows. The purpose is rather to selectively reflect on these sources in order to gain deeper understanding of the core themes and arguments that have informed ecotheology in the 21st century. Understanding what has influenced – not just the theology of today but also human

worldview, as well as our understanding of relationships – is important if we want to engage with the subject.

In his book *The Travail of Nature*, well known ecotheologian and ethics scholar Paul Santmire (1985) gives an historical overview of what he believes to be the main theological voices to engage in a theology of creation. Santmire does this by chronologically examining the work of key figures in creation theology as a response to the presiding theological worldview of their day. Santmire (1985:14-29) starts his book by outlining three important metaphors and motifs that he uses throughout to help the reader more clearly define various author's contributions. These are: The metaphor of accent and fecundity (Santmire, 1985:17-23) and of migration to a Good Land (Santmire, 1985:23-25).[13] Santmire (1985:29) continues by writing that if one find's a combination of the metaphor of migration and fecundity, an ecological motif arises; whilst the metaphor of accent can be seen as a spiritual motive. Santmire uses these metaphors throughout the book as beacons to engage different theological contributions.

The following section will more closely examine some noteworthy contributions in the field of creation theology. The list of authors has been chosen in reference to Santmire's work, but also because they address themes that might help the study better understand certain topics and ideas often found in contemporary Christian ecotheology. Furthermore, these authors offer examples of how they engaged certain issues and challenges in their context. Understanding their responses might aid in offering different perspectives and approaches that could hold potential in assisting our own response to the environmental crisis.

2.3.1. Irenaeus and Gnosticism

In *The Travail of Nature* (1985), Santmire starts his historical reflection on a Christian theology of creation with Irenaeus.[14] Irenaeus' theology is situated within the context of – and can be seen as a response to – the dualist worldview of Gnosticism. In *The Story of Christianity* (2010), González introduces Gnosticism as the belief that

[13] Also note that Santmire divides these three metaphors into what he calls two experimental matrixes called the Overwhelming Mountain (metaphors of ascent and fecundity) and The Promising Journey (metaphor of migration) (Santmire, 1985:16).
[14] Santmire includes Origen as a conversation partner to Irenaeus in his work, but because of the limited space and scope of this study, I chose to leave a reflection on Origen out of this section.

knowledge (*gnosis*) is the secret key to salvation (González, 2010a:59). González writes:

> Salvation was the main concern of the Gnostics. Drawing from several sources, they came to the conclusion that all matter is evil, or at least unreal. A human being is in reality an eternal spirit (or part of the eternal spirit) that somehow has been imprisoned in a body. Since the body is a prison to the spirit it misguides us as to our true nature, it is evil. Therefore, the Gnostic's final goal is to escape from the body and the material world in which we are exiled (González, 2010a:59).

The religious movement of Gnosticism finds its origins in the same time as the rise of Christianity and was a force to be reckoned with in the first two centuries of the Christian movement (Santmire, 1985:32). Santmire (1985:33) writes that the fundamental conviction of Gnosticism is that the Earth and everything contained in it is evil, underscoring a theological worldview of a God that is utterly removed and disconnected from the created reality.

Gnosticism is therefore inherently dualistic – removing the natural (material) world form the transcendent (spiritual). The material world is labelled as an evil prison from which the holy and good spirit needs to escape from on its "journey to get back home" to its "lost origin" (Rise, 2012:23). Santmire (1985:34) summarises the Gnostic approach to nature in three main parts: 1) God completely transcends and has a different character to the world – only God can be seen as light, everything else is considered darkness and evil; 2) humans are identified with the light – as carriers of what is called "the divine spark" – but are lost travellers trapped in the darkest part of the universe and 3) nature is in itself a prison – it is ruled by powers that enslave humans especially through the body. Gnosticism is a movement that manifested not just in Christianity but also in the wider society of the day. It was believed that a heavenly messenger was sent to give the knowledge that is needed to awake from the "dream" of our reality and be fully saved (González, 2010a:59). In Christianity this messenger is Christ, coming to remind his followers of their heavenly origin; taking the form of what looks like an Earthly human body only in appearance (González, 2010a:60). It is within this very fragmented and separated understanding of reality that Irenaeus' work originated.

Irenaeus (c.135-200) was originally from Asia Minor and became bishop of Lyon in southern Gaul after major persecution ended there in 177 (Rise, 2013:21). Irenaeus' work centred around defending the church against the heresies of Gnosticism but also wrote to "interpret and to celebrate the essentials of Christian gospel on behalf of the whole church of his day" (Santmire, 1985:31). The focus of Irenaeus was always to lead people away from speculation and back to the original sources of scripture and tradition where truth is found (Rise, 2013:21). Rise comments on his main work *Adversus Haereses*:

> In *Adversus Haereses* he holds the 'shadows' of pseudo-theologians up against the revealed reality – the body of Jesus Christ and the created world – for, according to Irenaeus, in theology we are dealing with facts (Rise, 2013:21).

One could say that Irenaeus' theology strived to bring faith "back down to earth" in a way by reaffirming creation as humanity's God-given home (Santmire, 1985:35). Gnosticism skews faith, overemphasising the spiritual and holiness of human beings. When writing on the work of Arnold van Ruler, Lombard (2012:133) highlights the nature of two key realities in Christian faith: The reality of the world, nature and history; and the reality of salvation and redemption. He emphasises the need for these two realities to be balanced (Lombard, 2012:133). It is exactly this balance that is threatened in Gnosticism with an over fixation on salvation and it is in Irenaeus' response that he tries to bring back a balance rooted in the coming of Christ (Lombard, 2012:133).

For Irenaeus creation is not bad or evil but created by God in order to be fulfilled (Santmire, 1985:35). Therefore, creation is not created and left to be static, but it was always God's plan for creation (and humanity) to continue to grow and mature into something i.e., to become (Rise, 2013:29). The fall caused humanity to be so damaged that its natural development ceased and could never fully develop to maturity – that is until Christ, the second Adam (Rise, 2013:29). It is in Christ that not just humanity but the whole history of divine creation is fulfilled (Santmire, 1985:37). Because all of creation and not just humans are included in this fulfilment, one could argue that this final fulfilment would have taken place even if Adam had not sinned (Santmire, 1985:35).

The work of Irenaeus is particularly significant in that it confronts the denial of value and unimportance of the material world one finds in Gnosticism. Deane-Drummond (2012:72) writes that these are ideas that are not just present in old traditions such as Gnosticism but are also views emphasised in "modern systems of thought that tend to devalue the natural world, or oppose body and spirit". Examining Irenaeus' response to the theological heresies of his time, might help us in rooting our faith and theology in all of creation as we respond to our own dualist systems and worldviews today.

2.3.2. Augustine, Manicheism and Neo-Platonism

Augustine (c.354-430) – also known as Saint Augustine or Augustine of Hippo – is known as one of the most influential figures in the history of Western theology and thought (Santmire, 1985:55). Augustine was born in Thasgaste, in North Africa to a pagan farther (which was a minor Roman official) and a fervent Christian mother (González, 2010a:208). Having seen promise in their son from an early age, his parents sent a young Augustine to Madaura and later Carthage to get an education in rhetoric (González, 2010a:208). After his education Augustine crossed the Mediterranean to teach rhetoric in Rome and later in the imperial court of Milan (Rasmussen, 2013:87). It is in Milan where he finally converted to the Christian faith in 386 (Dunham, 2012:76). Before his conversion Augustine was associated with two different streams of religious and philosophical thought, namely Manicheism (also known as Manichean religion or thought) and Neo-Platonism (Dunham, 2012:76). Key to understanding Augustine's work and influence is getting a better understanding of these two streams of thought and how it influenced the Hellenistic worldview in Augustine's time.

Augustine was first introduced to Manichean thought while studying in Carthage (González, 2010a:208). In his chapter titled "Creaturely Salvation in Augustine" Dunham (2012:76) observes some of the main underpinnings of Manichean thought and why it is important for understanding the work of Augustine. Dunham writes:

> Of importance to us is the fact that Manicheism promoted a dualistic understanding of reality, where the coeternal principles of light (God) and darkness (matter) are in combat. A whole system of religious practices and rules are meant to help the release of light from earthly bodies so that they may return to their source. […] This dualist belief was thoroughly materialistic, which

> Augustine explains to have been part of its appeal to him as a younger student who could not comprehend the idea of a non-material existence. Manichean belief cultivated a dislike of the material world because of its view of matter as evil (Dunham, 2012:76).

After nine years of adhering to Manicheism, Augustine discovered Neo-Platonism during his time in Milan. Neo-Platonism is a very popular philosophy with religious overtones following the work and teachings of Plotinus (c.205-270) which was built on the philosophy of Plato (González, 2010a:210). The whole idea of Neo-Platonism revolves around the overflowing of a singular principle – known as the One – through a process of emanation (Santmire, 1985:46). Within this understanding there is a hierarchy of order and the aim is to get closer to the One that is the source of all being; the realities that are closer to the One are superior (González, 2010a:210). Though this helped Augustine move away from a purely material understanding of reality, Neo-Platonism brought along its own sets of challenges and contradictions to the Christian faith. This way of understanding reality creates a spectrum of hierarchy starting with the purely spiritual reality of the One, all the way down towards visible animate and inanimate creatures (Santmire, 1985:45). In other words: the spiritual gradually gives way to the material (Santmire, 1985:45). This way of thinking not only understands creaturely reality as less superior but when applied to Christian understanding confesses a God that is absolutely transcendent.

After his conversion and calling as a bishop to Hippo in 391, much of Augustine's work centred around themes arising from his Manichean and Neo-Platonist background. Issues surrounding the origin of evil, sin, salvation, understanding creation and *imago Dei* are central themes in Augustine's work. We find a clear evolution of Augustine's theology, moving from a very negative and material centred theology in Manicheanism towards a deeper acceptance and search for the spiritual, after finally we find a more Earth-honouring faith. According to Dunham (2012:82) we find important shifts in his theological reflections on Romans 8:19-23 and Psalm 35. Reflections on these texts highlight a scriptural account of God's providence that sees creation as good (Dunham, 2012:84) and affirms that the created world as a whole will be part of God's new heaven and Earth (Dunham, 2012:87). Augustine however does not unite the story of human salvation as part of the story of creation history (Santmire, 1985:71).

The complexity and breath of Augustine's work cannot be adequately summarised and engaged in this study. Though we see an important change in the progression of Augustine's life and theology, many of the underlining theological beliefs of his Manichean and Neo-Platonist beliefs can still be found in his work and legacy. Two such examples for instance is in part some Reformed traditions' overemphasis on the ascent of the soul from earth and the body (Rasmussen, 1996:190) and the notion of original sin and fallenness (or depravity) of humanity (Conradie, 2005:192).

It aids this study to understand Augustine's works in context; especially in terms of his engagement with dualist and transcendent faith traditions. Santmire (1985:73) states that in the end Augustine's work makes an important shift in key metaphors – focussing on metaphors of migration to a good land and fecundity – influencing theology in his time to move toward a viable theology of nature. Because of this underlying metaphorical dynamic, we can start to see an ecological promise in classical Christian theology (Santmire, 1985:73). Though many ambiguities still exist in Augustine's work, it stands as a hopeful promise of an ecological motive in a time that was characterised by very dualistic and materialistic thought.

2.3.3. St. Francis of Assisi and the Middle Ages

To honestly capture the depth of Saint Francis of Assisi's life and influence is almost an undoable task, some see St. Francis as one of the most famous and universally recognised spiritual figures of the human race (Vauchez, 2012:IX). St. Francis has been an inspiration to many, with authors like Wolf (2003:3) stating that he might arguably be one of the most attractive saints in the Catholic church, capturing the imagination of Latin Christendom like no living saint has ever done. Even White – which highlights the role of Christianity in the environmental crisis – finds inspiration and hope in St. Francis' life and writings, proposing him as a patron saint for ecologists (White,1967:1207). Taking into account the enormous library of literature written and shared on the man and his life, it is very easy to get lost in the multitude of voices and perspectives. St. Francis is not just an historical figure but has in some ways almost become a mythical and iconic character to many.

Francis of Assisi (1181-1226) was born to a wealthy family in the small city of Assisi in Italy. In his book *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, Boff (1997) dedicates the last chapter to closer examine St. Francis and his contributions as an example of an

alternative lifestyle and ecotheology. Boff observes his early years and summarises St. Francis' search for meaning as a youth:

> Francis was the head of a group of young libertines who devoted themselves wholeheartedly to the *cantillenae amatoriae*, gambling, and sumptuous banquets. Restless and very sensitive, he was a sounding board for the ambitions in the minds of young people at that time. Francis tried each of them: the bourgeois endeavour of becoming wealthy, the feudal endeavour of being a noble gentleman, the religious endeavour of being a monk. Each of these endeavours presented its particular utopia, its ideal of perfection and heroism. Francis tried them all. He wanted to be wealthy like his father; he experienced being a knight in the wars; and for a short time he tried to be a Benedictine monk. But drew back from each of them, because none spoke to this own depths and aroused enthusiasm in him (Boff, 1997:206).

This search for true purpose culminated in St. Francis renouncing all his wealth and embracing a life of absolute poverty. It is said that after a time of prayer and fasting he gave up his social class and started living with those lowest on the social order: lepers (Boff, 1997:207). This search for an ever deeper and meaningful life in simplicity and poverty is epitomised by St. Francis' pursuit of "Lady Poverty" (Wolf, 2003:31). In his book *The Poverty of Riches*, Wolf (2003) examines this metaphor and underscores the importance of it when understanding St. Francis' life and theology. In this metaphor St. Francis pursues Lady Poverty as a lover. St. Francis confessed his love and devotion to her, with some texts citing him as even proclaiming his marriage to Lady Poverty (González, 2010a:302). For Wolf the metaphor is "simply the personification of that kind of poverty that St. Francis and his followers cultivated: a poverty without cares, a poverty that served as a source of comfort, a poverty that required great effort to achieve and to maintain" (Wolf, 2003:32). It is in this quest to be fully overcome in his pursuit of poverty that he discovered the pure gospel as good news amongst the poorest of the poor in the figure of – what Boff calls "Poor Man par excellence" – Jesus Crucified (Boff, 1997:207).

St. Francis was not an academic or scholarly person *per se*, therefore understanding and examining his life is just as important as what he says or writes (Santmire, 1985:106). Santmire writes: "Therefore, in order to ascertain his theology of nature,

we cannot simply read what he wrote. But we can venture to read his life, which is rich with theological meaning and has a kind of poetry all its own" (Santmire, 1985:106). St. Francis took on a life of physical and "holy poverty" (Wolf, 2003:4) and in doing so creating a new order known as the "lesser brothers and sisters" (Thompson, 2012:50) at the height of Medieval Christianity in a time that was epitomised by the growing chiasm between rich and poor (González, 2010a:302). Though the theology of St. Francis has much to do with material possessions and spiritual poverty, his embodied way of life and theology has made influential contributions towards an Earth-honouring faith. Two of the most important themes is that of partnership and a very embodied (and relational) understanding of humanity and faith.

St. Francis had a deep sense for the interconnectedness and interdependence of all things; for him other creatures where co-siblings of creation in the drama of shared life (Rasmussen, 1996:236). Therefore, in St. Francis' theology, this kinship does not only reflect on human-Earth relations but goes even wider; it is a cosmic democracy (Boff, 1997:211). This way of thinking differs from other traditional models, in that other created beings are seen as equals and not as objects or lesser. In a partnership paradigm the rest of creation is not commodified; there is a much bigger awareness of human power is enforced. Rasmussen (1996:237) writes that the question is not if humans exercise power and dominium over nature, that is a given, the question should rather be: How do we exercise power?

Conradie (2005:216) comments on this by stating the Franciscan notion of partnership suggests a joyful form of ascetism. In a later volume Rasmussen (2013:249) writes that Ascetism as a way of life in God that includes "outward" elements of life (has to do with everyday life and community for example) as well as "inward" (godly of spiritual). Much of St. Francis' theology reflects common elements in Ascetism: "The quest on one level is for our "natural" humanity, our "true" self, the kind of creatures we were created as and, deep down, still are" (Rasmussen, 2013:249). These thoughts are also reflected in what Boff (1997:216) refers to as the fusion of outer and inner ecology. When violence between humans and nature continue to persist, it is as result of a failure on the part of humans to integrate environmental-, social- and mental ecology (Boff, 1997:216).

In the work of St. Francis, we find something very different from the traditions this study has already addressed. Unlike the dualistic views of Neo-Platonism and other movements mentioned above that withdrew from the sensual world in order to contemplate God, he "attained these heights of contemplation through his penetration vision of creation" (Delio, 2012:128). Throughout his theology St. Francis placed an emphasis on creation as a good gift from God and helped develop a deeper trinitarian understanding of God. In the concluding remarks of her chapter "Creation and Salvation: Franciscan Perspectives" found in *Creation and Salvation: Volume 1* (2012), Delio aptly reflects on Franciscan theology's contribution to ecotheology:

> Franciscan theology is a rich resource for our contemporary world as we seek to engage the household of creation as the dwelling place of God's love and cosmos, of which we are members, as family. The integral relationship between creation and divine goodness imparts positive value to every aspect of creation and unique dignity to every human person. To be created is to be related and Christ is the model of perfect relationship. To follow Christ, therefore, is to attain union in love and thus to be related to every creature as brother and sister. It is the grace of healing and wholeness in love for the sake of all creation (Delio, 2012:143).

2.3.4. Luther, Calvin and the Protestant Reformation

Thus far we have examined the work at the contributions of three different authors within three very distinct historical contexts. These three authors have engaged with different challenges and theological streams of their day, helping this study get a better grasp on terms like Gnosticism, Manicheanism, Neo-Platonism and others. Having laid this foundation, the study now turns its attention to the Protestant Reformation and the subsequent changes in society thereafter that gave rise to the industrial revolution at a later stage.

2017 marked the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. It was an event that was widely celebrated across the world and also enjoyed much attention within the Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa. So many years after the Reformation took place in 1507, many theologians still reflect on what it means to be Reformed in today's

time.[15] One might wonder so many years on what well known Reformed theologians like Martin Luther (1483-1546) and John Calvin (1509-1564) had to say about creation? Or perhaps what their reflections on the nature of God, creation and humanity could mean for us today in the face of environmental crisis?

Luther and Calvin come from very different backgrounds and have different approaches when it comes to addressing their contexts. Yet, both are widely celebrated and form an important part of the DRC's heritage.[16] The context of in which the Reformation took place is widely known amongst Reformed theologians. Many authors like González (2010b:6) write that the end of the 15th century was a time of decay and moral corruption for the church. At the turning of the century it became obvious that the church was not just morally bankrupt but had also gone astray with its teachings (González, 2010b:7). However, this study doesn't wish to dwell on the events and impact of the Reformation itself. Rather, it seeks to uncover more about Luther and Calvin's thoughts on creation in the hope that it can aid of this study.

2.3.4.1. Luther and the good creation

In his article titled "Martin Luther's Theology of Creation" (2016), Johannes Schwanke outlines some central thoughts in Luther's theology of creation and discusses the potential of these thought for our context today (Schwanke, 2016:400). Schwanke (2016:400) engages Luther's work and proves its relevance for contemporary discussions by focussing on individual (2016:400-404), contemporary (2016:404-408), corporeal (2016:408-410) and dialogical character (2016:410-413) of Luther's theology of creation. Schwanke (2016:413) concludes that creation theology lies at the centre of Luther's theology. He writes:

> […] in developing a theology of creation that centers around the individuality, contemporaneity, corporeality and dialogical character of God's work, Luther speaks to our world in ways that contain helpful correctives to influential tendencies in modern thought (Schwanke, 2016:413).

[15] One could argue the most notable of these in South Africa to be world renowned systematic theologian Dirkie Smit as encapsulated by his reflections and essays found in the South Africa media and through his series of entitled *Essays on Being Reformed* (2009) and *Opstelle oor Gereformeerd-wees Vandag* (2013).

[16] Though many might argue that the DRC leans much more toward the Calvinist tradition; Luther still remains an important figure.

Noteworthy in particular for this study is how Schwanke shows the emphasis of individuality in Luther's theology of creation. Luther's theology of creation begins firstly with the individual as created by a personal creator (Schwanke, 2016:400). It's from this individuality that we find Luther's soteriological discourse on justification; which Schwanke (2016:402) warns against as being susceptible to a theology that only focusses on personal faith. He however argues that Luther did not mean for an overly anthropocentric perspective on these matters and therefore incorporates the individual into the greater community of creation (Schwanke, 2016:403). Maybe it is this vulnerability to a fixation on personal faith Santmire (1985:121) alludes to in his earlier work when he seems quite critical of both Luther and Calvin, arguing that they were preoccupied with the metaphor of accent; too focussed on the discourse of salvation and in many ways have not truly moved away from the same mode of thinking as the Middle Ages. In this regard Schwanke (2016:402) also mentions that Luther in many ways reflect the "spirit of the age" and the priorities of the Renaissance.

In a later chapter on Luther and salvation, Santmire (2012:173) seems less critical in tone but cautions that Luther's theology can sometimes be elusive at best; with many imprinting their own ideologies onto his work. Santmire (2012:174) does however believe that for Luther a theology of creation wasn't a mere add-on but rather an integral part of his thought and theology. In the end he sees Luther's reflections not as works of systematic theology, but rather focussing on the biblical narrative of the good creation, reconciliation and redemption (Santmire, 2012:192).

There are also those who really delve into Luther's theology of creation in an attempt to bring it into conversation with contemporary ecotheologies. One of these authors are Larry Rasmussen. In his book *Earth Community, Earth Ethics*, Rasmussen (1996) takes a deeper look into the aspects of Luther's work that reflects on the immanence of God as reflected in creation. He argues parallels between Luther and Bonhoeffer, stating that both believe that God is revealed in nature; also referred to in Latin as *finitum capax infiniti* (Rasmussen, 1996:272). Rasmussen (1996:272) also highlights the parallels that can be drawn between Calvin and Barth whom on the other hand insist that the finite cannot hold the infinite (*finitum non capax infiniti*).

According to Rasmussen (1996:273) it was a common catholic belief up until the Enlightenment that God is both revealed in scripture and in nature. For Luther to fall

in love with God, means to fall in love with the Earth and indeed ourselves, leading Rasmussen to go as far as calling Luther boldly panentheistic (Rasmussen, 1996:273).[17] Santmire (2012:196) also mentions Luther's reflections on the cosmic nature of Christ and understanding the universe as God's body. This reflects thoughts that are particularly associated with the work of theologians like Teilhard, Berry and McFague which will be discussed later in chapter four of this study. Luther's engagement with the physical body (or flesh) and his affirmation of creation as good – in his theology of creation and incarnation – is also noteworthy (Greyvenstein, 2018:63).

A lot of effort has been done engaging Martin Luther's works and much more can be said about his contributions. Discussing how authors experience his work more than 500 years later opens up some questions. One could ask why not more of his creation theology has been accepted, embodied or even discussed in a denomination like the DRC? Could it be that the emphasis on justification and personal salvation was so important to his context and reception that other contribution have been overlooked? These are not questions that can be answered here. It seems that one could argue the value Luther's work holds to our context today in light of the environmental crisis. Maybe taking a quick look at another big influence in the Reformed tradition and a contemporary of Luther, John Calvin, could be insightful.

2.3.4.2. Calvin and the theatre of God's glory

For Calvin, the most important doctrine in his work was the doctrine of the knowledge of God (Santmire, 1985:123). In a chapter titled "John Calvin on Creation and Salvation: A Creative Tension?" (2012), Conradie addresses themes of creation and salvation in Calvin's work. Conradie (2012c:205) argues that one central concern is how the knowledge of God as creator is related to the knowledge of God as saviour. Conradie (2012c:203-206) firstly highlights the difficulty of capturing Calvin's position on these themes and then moves to outline his approach in highlighting the connections between these two themes in the chapter. Concerning the motive of creation in Calvin's work, Conradie (2012c:207) cites many authors in outlining his

[17] Panentheism is a term accosted with the belief that God is revealed in nature but is not worshiped as nature. This term will be further discussed in chapter four of this study.

method and chooses to engage with constructive contributions on Calvin's legacy in the context of ecotheology. He writes:

> Here, Calvin's appreciation of the natural world; his contemplation of the "theatre of God's glory"; his emphasis on pervasive sovereignty of God extending over the whole creation; his emphasis on vocation, a sense of divine calling and of human labour (including commercial activity), leading to an activist and world-transformative spirituality; his consistent emphasis on that which is material in order to avoid a Gnostic or Anabaptist form of spiritualising; his emphasis virtues such as moderation, humility, fragility and generosity; and his sense of realism in everyday affairs are more typically explored (Conradie, 2012c:207).

Conradie (2012c:208) goes on to examine these themes in dialogue with Calvin's discussions on heaven in his *Institutes*, focussing on heaven and creation theology (2012c:208-214), heaven and eschatology (2012c:214-220) and lastly heaven and sacramental theology (2012c:220-222). Hesselink (2004:85) writes that in the first five chapters of the *Institutes* one sees Calvin's marvels at the beauty and complexity of creation. For Calvin there is an order to creation, with God governing and sustaining the universe and its inhabitants (Hesselink, 2004:85). The Holy Spirit is the fountain of life that is poured out on the whole of creation (Moltmann, 1985:11). Haas (2004:93) connects this order and governance as the foundation for Calvin's ethics.

All this being said it could still be hard to get a clear grasp on Calvin's thoughts on creation. This could partly be because of the fact that neither Calvin nor Luther clearly systematised their thought about nature (Santmire, 1985:127). Santmire (1985:123) critiques Calvin for his anthropocentrism (just as he did with Luther), stating that there is a heightened emphasis on believers to transform the world rather than to live within it in love (1985:126). In Calvin, Santmire (1985:127) sees the influence of the spiritual motif that is embedded in his theology of divine election, that has very anthropocentric ethical implications. The thrust of both Calvin and Luther's engagement with nature comes back to their preoccupation with human salvation, with Santmire (1985:122) even going as far as to say that it helped set the stage for the development of thought that gave rise to the secularisation of nature. Conradie (2006:84) writes that the distinctive theocentric orientation of Calvin continues to shape the ethos of the Reformed tradition. Conradie continues:

> […] its view of creation as the theatre of God's glory, its strong emphasis on the impact of the fall, the need for God's activity to sustain creation and to restrict evil, and its sense of the place and vocation of humans in the earth community to establish God's reign (Conradie, 2006:84-85).

To conclude then one would be foolish to come to concrete assumptions on these iconic figures in such a short discussion. To label these contributions in one way or another is not helpful to this study. Rather it must be noted that these figures have the potential to become dialogue partners in our current contexts. Further research and interaction are needed to understand how their theologies have impacted our thoughts and faith today. Even more important is that one needs to understand their contributions within their contexts. Much more can be said about their reflections on Christ, Lord's Supper (Moltmann, 1985:173) and other topics that cannot be discussed here. Also, the impact of their thoughts on early ecotheologians like Sittler and Kuyper for example cannot be further discussed here. For now, it is hoped that reflections on these Reformed theologians can aid us in understanding certain theological traits that are visible in the DRC today.

2.3.5. The birth of the Industrialised World

Thus far we have looked at certain authors and time periods that have helped us gauge a better understanding of past contributions in creation theology. One could argue that these reflections might be useful in guiding the DRC in its search to understand possible origins of its thoughts on faith, the world, God, as well as the role of humanity and creation. This section draws to an end by lastly mentioning what Santmire (1985:133) refers to as the industrial-mechanical approach to nature and reflects on some thoughts that may have had a lasting effect on how we perceive the world today.

One could argue that at the heart of the industrial-mechanical view of nature lies deep changes and developments within science, religion and technology. Okada (2017:64) writes that in Europe during the Middle Ages, Christianity held absolute power and influence. However, this began to change when Copernicus and Galileo arrived at the scene in the 16th century (Okada, 2017:64). A new movement known as the Copernican revolution brought forth a combination of discoveries by scientists like Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo, Newton and others (Ayala, 2017:153). Ayala (2017:153)

writes that these discoveries “in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had gradually ushered in a conception of the universe as matter in motion governed by natural laws”. Ayala continues:

> It was shown that Earth is not the center of the universe, but a small planet rotating around an average-sized star; that the universe is immense in space and in time; and that the motion of the planets round the Sun can be explained by the same simple laws that account for the motion of physical objects on our planet (Ayala, 2017:153).

These findings had a profound impact on the world and completely changed the way in which humanity perceived its place in the universe. These discoveries and advancements made humans think about creation more like a machine, changing what value humanity added to nature (Santmire, 1985:133). With new knowledge of nature and how to harness it, humanity began developing a new relationship with creation. As Moltmann (1985:127) puts it, soon the becoming of human history no longer corresponded with the becoming of nature. Human ideals where no longer aligned with nature, but now in agreement with their own hopes and purposes (Moltmann, 1985:127).

Along with changes in thought and philosophy, industry started to grow and whole new scales of economic activity kickstarted the environmental crisis we face today. Humanity now had the power to bypass rhythms of nature through its use of fossil fuels, all whilst building their own environment and living habitat (Rasmussen, 2010:53). The effects of this can clearly be seen from the onset of the Industrial Revolution that started in 1750 and the subsequent extreme acceleration of pollution, economic growth, (urban) population, transportation, deforestation and so forth (Rasmussen, 2010:56). By the beginning of the 19th century the industrial revolution had reached most of Europe and contributed greatly to the idea of progress (González, 2010b:283). Ever since the idea of growth without limits, the destruction of nature for our own gain has been at the order of the day.

The impact of this combination of new scientific discoveries, theories, technological advances and the rise of industrial capitalism can all be directly related to the present-day environmental crisis (Conradie, 2006:28). It is engrained in the way in which the global economy works and even how we live our daily lives. Humanity has by its own

power changed the world and it would never be the same. It must also be stated that that a lot of good has come from these developments as well. It has significantly increased human capability to combat illness and better human lives. It has propelled humanity and advanced society in ways that almost seemed unimaginable in the past. It has given deep knowledge of the universe and our existence here on Earth. The question is just: At what cost? Irrespective, the industrialisation of the human race has had an immense effect on the story of the human race and the way in which we live and see the world.

2.4. Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to critically reflect on a selection of authors and contributions that one might argue to be valuable in aiding to paint a better picture of the ecotheological landscape of the DRC. This was done by firstly defining ecotheology and framing it as a relatively new discipline that is rooted in much older traditions of creation theology. This section also focussed on introducing some key themes and elements of ecotheology, proposing three elements that in some way could be argued to form a part of most ecotheologies for the sake of this study. These include that ecotheology tries to understand the past events that have given rise to the current environmental crisis; ecotheology tries to engage with the complexity of relationships between God, humanity and creation; ecotheology is in some way or another concerned with the current environmental crisis.

After framing ecotheology in this manner, the chapter moved towards briefly discussing a selection of theologians and contributions, placing them within their contexts. This was done to help better deconstruct terms and vocabulary discussed in ecotheologies; indicate a progression in theology of creation; highlight important shifts in thought and theology; to mention and learn from author's responses to the challenges of their context. This was in no way a complete selection of authors, themes and periods, but where chosen to help create a framework of discussion and reference point within the study. These contributions focus heavily on European theology, philosophy and thought because one could argue that these form part of the DRC's theological heritage. The importance of a diversity of theologies and voices should not be understated, but due to limitations in the study, a narrower and select focus was needed.

The goal of this study is to sketch a landscape of ecotheology within the DRC. This chapter wished to outline some of the theologies that in some way or another might have brought the DRC's theology to this point in time. Having looked to the past, the study will now shift focus towards the current context of South Africa.

Chapter 3: The environmental crisis in South Africa and the DRC's response

3.1. Introduction

In chapter two this study gave a brief historical overview of some noteworthy concepts and theological voices in the field of creation theology. This helped paint a clearer picture of the possible origins of ecotheology and the development of it over time. This understanding of themes and concepts has the potential to help orientate towards common traits in ecotheology in order to better sketch and understand the landscape of ecotheological discourse in the DRC. However, it must be noted that having a grasp on some ecotheological voices does not automatically translate into a positive engagement with the environmental crisis in a specific context. This is even more true when it comes to countries like South Africa with overwhelming socio-economic challenges such as economic inequality and corruption. The contextual element of ecotheology comes into play here, emphasising the importance of doing theology from within the local context. A warning should however be issued. The realities of theoretical theology do not always align with the real-world problems. This fact is even more stressed by the discrepancies between prevailing theological voices that are predominantly from a Western theological perspective and in many ways far removed from the realities of the African context.

Therefore, this chapter seeks to better understand the South African context and how to engage issues of poverty, inequality and human rights within the ecotheological discourse. Doing this is important because some have been critical of an over focus on environmental issues while many human beings do not have access to basic amenities like clean drinking water, healthy food or proper housing and sanitation. This is the central tension that this chapter will try to wrestle with. It's also important to be attentive for these challenges when understanding the DRC's engagement with contextual issues and the role the church plays in society. One cannot adequately engage health and prevalence of ecotheology within the denomination if one does not situate the church within a holistic understanding of environment.

3.2. Ecotheology and the South African context

As the main aim of this study is to sketch the landscape of ecotheology within the DRC, this chapter would like to explore the DRC's response to the environmental crisis in the South African context. In order to do this task just, one needs to incorporate local theological contributions. Understanding these authors from within the framework chapter two has aimed to create might help the study grasp deeper reflections on environment and society within the South African context. Finding a starting point for such reflections can be challenging.

This study would like to propose the work of acclaimed Reformed theologian and ethicist Ernst Conradie. Conradie is an esteemed scholar that one could argue has contributed greatly to the ecotheological discourse in South Africa. This choice is made on the grounds that he comes from a theological and ecclesiological tradition that relates to the DRC. Therefore, reflecting on a selection of his contributions[18] could aid the study in gaining a deeper understanding of the issues, tensions and influences that make up the ecotheological landscape in the South African and DRC context.

3.2.1. At home on Earth?

Ernst Conradie is a well-known theologian in systematic theology and ethics. He is currently senior professor in the Department of Religion and Theology at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) and has published many noteworthy contributions to the ecotheological discourse. One could argue that his many volumes of work and diverse collaborations have made an important contribution to the local and international discourse on ecotheology. Though it is hard to estimate the extent of the influence Conradie's work has had on ecotheological discourse in South Africa, it must be stated that the influence of his work is an important part of the discourse in South Africa. Conradie picks up on important theological themes that one could argue are central

[18] Conradie has contributed so much to the discourse on ecotheology and environmental ethics. Choosing what to focus on is a challenging prospect. This study chose to focus more on engaging with issues that can be connected to ethics. Therefore, a bigger focus is given on Conradie's work that touches on environmental justice, an integrated approach to environment and his engagement with metaphors and themes like the Earth as God's house. The depth of Conradie's work does however extend much further. Most notably his engagement with ideas of salvation and sin, as well as discussions over issues of food security. His work on the early ecotheology of Abraham Kuyper (2011b) is also a noteworthy contribution which is not explored further in this study.

concerns when it comes to faith communities and their response to the environmental crisis.

Several faith communities in recent years have successfully started to engage and respond to the environmental crisis, realising that the church has an important role to play and really has the potential to be agents of change in local communities (Conradie, 2011a:15). For many faith communities however, the environmental crisis does not seem to enjoy the attention of other theological and social issues do. This appears to be in part because many don't deem the environment or ecology to be of biblical concern; an idea which can in many cases be traced back to old Christian faith traditions or worldviews (as seen in chapter two of this study). Conradie (2011a:2) highlights four crucial areas that he feels needs to be addressed if the Christian faith is to foster a theology and response to the environmental crisis that is not shallow: 1) A lack of clarity regarding the relationship between God and the world (transcendence), 2) a dualist understanding of body (matter) and soul, 3) a notion of salvation that focusses on human well-being, 4) and an escapist view of human destiny.

To help address some of these roadblocks, Conradie (2005) highlights important questions about dominant ecotheological themes in his book *An Ecological Christian Anthropology*. The main question Conradie poses in the book is if we as humans are at home on Earth. In the context of most ecotheological contributions this question could seem odd, seeing as a big theme within the field of study tries to intentionally emphasise humanity's place on Earth. This is usually accentuated by a focus on human connectedness and dependence with the whole of the created world, by using the metaphor of the Earth as humanity's only home. Conradie (2005:44) acknowledges the importance of these themes in helping to overcome the alienation between humans and creation but feels that in many cases this approach does not adequately take the reality of human suffering, sin and death into account.

An overemphasis on Earth as humanity's home can in many ways lead to a romantic view of the relationship between humans and creation. For Conradie there is an inherit darker side to nature that needs to be addressed. There is an underlying tension between the good and destructive nature of creation, or as Conradie (2005:47) puts it: "She is our Mother and our enemy". This is an important point echoed by many, with

Bedford-Strohm (2011:51) for instance addressing this paradox by acknowledging the conflict between human beings and "non-human" nature. Bedford-Strohm (2011:51) warns against a romantic perspective of nature, stating that there is violence in nature. He also honestly reflects that human power and violence has become so overpowering that nature has to defend itself against human beings (Bedford-Strohm, 2011:51). If one is to use the image of the Earth as God's household, one must be realistic in acknowledging that within this household there is a lot of suffering, violence and pain (Conradie, 2005:44).

The idea to see the Earth as our house or household (oikos) is a common theme within ecotheology, and forms part of an even older biblical tradition (Gottfried, 1995:29). With such metaphorical language it could be easy to oversimplify this approach to understanding Earth. An author like Conradie (2005:44) points to the complexity of interceding relationships and warns that one must be careful of an oversimplified understanding of creation. He is not dismissing this approach but rather calls for a deeper theology that incorporates more dimensions than just a creation theology approach. He calls for an integrated approach that combines the doctrine of creation with doctrine of humanity and doctrine of God (Conradie, 2005:10). His conclusion when engaging the metaphor of home is that, the Earth is not yet our home (Conradie, 2005:63). Conradie (2005:13) argues rather than situating human belonging solely in terms of created reality, it should rather be situated in eschatological longing because: "It is only through the Christian longing for a new earth that we can discover our belonging, in body and soul on earth. The earth may therefore be our one and only house but it is not our home yet […] the earth is God's house, not ours, in which God dwells through the Spirit" (Conradie, 2005:13). Though many ecotheologians are opposed to notions of an escapist theology that could very easily be reduced to a "pie-in-the-sky"[19] theology, Conradie does not do this and is weary of throwing out the baby with the bathwater. For Conradie (2005:60) it is exactly because of this danger that he feels it is important to embrace the transcendent in life or else the temptation to live without consequences is still present.

[19] One could define pie-in-the-sky theology as a theology that overemphasizes the transcendent elements of faith. This can refer to eschatology in particular where a new life or reality after the current one on Earth is overemphasized as an over simplistic response human suffering and pain. The idea that everything will one day be better is key to this thinking. It is a future expectation that tends to put hope on the future rather than engage with current issues.

3.2.2. Humanity and God's household

In the book Conradie is in search of an ecological Christian anthropology, which leads him to asking important questions on human uniqueness and dignity by homing in on what it means for humans to be created *Imago Dei* (in the image of God). Conradie concludes this reflection by writing:

> In this chapter we have seen thus far that human species is indeed unique, but that every other species is unique too. We do have dignity in God's eyes and should therefore treat other human beings with dignity too. However, such dignity does not necessarily entitle us to a special place, a position of privilege in God's household. We have a special position of responsibility, but that is primarily a function of human power and the devastating impact of human presence on the earth's ecosystems (Conradie, 2005:135).

Conradie touches on the potential humans have to use their power to change the world and habitat around them. Gottfried (1995:16) also affirms this stating that although humanity lives as a part of creation, we can alter our environment more than any other creature. Conradie (2005:135) builds on this idea, emphasising how a better understanding of human place can help break down anthropocentric worldviews:

> In exercising this responsibility, we have to realise our dependence on other forms of life and on the planet's ecosystems as a whole. This assessment of place of humanity in the earth community may help us to escape from the anthropocentrism which pervades much of contemporary theology. In fact, it calls for a more strictly theological critique of such anthropocentrism (Conradie, 2005:135).

These insights are important contributions to the environmental discussions in South Africa. It reminds us that we need to dig deeper and not over romanticize (or oversimplify) our position and relation to the whole created community. Addressing issues such as the true place of humans in creation, questions around salvation and understanding of the journey creation is on – are all important foci to highlight if the church wants to make a valuable and deep contribution in addressing the environmental crisis. Throughout Conradie brings back his argument to the Trinitarian God, constantly rooting his theological reflections in the nature of deep communion

and relationship. Furthermore, the idea of a house with many rooms, or of a village with many huts (Conradie, 2005:61) are relatable images to the Southern African context and helps the reader visualise and gain deeper understanding of the relationship between God, creation and humans. Humanity is not at home on Earth, yet this is God's house in which we stay. These reflections remind us that we need to be retold that there are others that also have right to this house and that humanity needs to be conscious of how it exerts its power within this community.

3.2.3. Towards a holistic understanding of environment

In his book *Christianity and Earthkeeping*, Conradie (2011) addresses an important point that rings true for many. Conradie (2011a:11) writes that although there has been an almost overwhelming flood of statistics, information and movements all communicating the severity of the environmental crisis, humanity has still to respond in a way that turns the tide. There is a sense that although the efforts of the past decades have made an important difference, many still don't engage and do not take any positive action towards change. Others feel overwhelmed and are doubtful that individual action can really bring any discernible transformation. It is also true that the environmental crisis and pleas from the global scientific community have been met with some scepticism. This also reflects the sentiment of many within the South African context.

An important distinction Conradie makes centres around the perceptions and interpretations of what people understand as environment. In Conradie's words: "The environment means different things to different people" (Conradie 2006:9). While some see the environment purely as nature, there are those who understand environment as living space in which the context of daily life plays out. Because of opposing understandings, environmental concerns have been met with scepticism by many (Conradie & Field, 2016:26). The destination of what constitutes environment is important in South Africa where nature conservation policies of the apartheid era focussed heavily on the creation of national parks, while the suffering of those living in oppression under atrocious conditions were ignored (Conradie, 2006:9). This is why, still today, several green environmental movements and concerns are seen by many as hobbies or projects by the affluent minority, while others are concerned with the day-to-day struggle to survive (Conradie, 2011a:39).

Because of these opposing views and understanding of environment, different concerns come to the surface when people start having dialogue about the environment. What is important in discussions on environmental issues, is creating a basis for an integrated view of the environment. Conradie (2006:12) outlines this view as one that accounts for a holistic integration summed up in the following elements: 1) The biophysical environment, 2) the built environment, 3) the social environment, 4) the economic environment, 5) the political environment and 6) the cultural environment. These elements are best summarised with the following figure as found in Conradie and Field (2011:29):

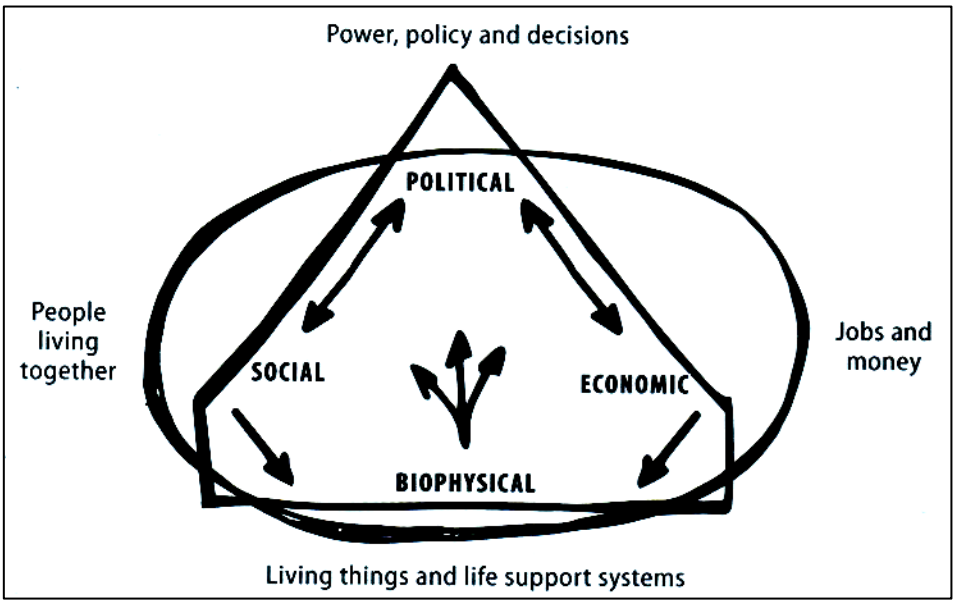


Figure 3.2.3.1: Social, political, economic and biophysical dimensions of the environment. Source: Conradie and Field (2011:29).

Having an integrated understanding of environment is crucial if any positive dialogue or action is to take place in addressing the environmental crisis in South Africa. Conradie helps the reader understand that talking about the environment does not simply mean engaging with climate change, deforestation, pollution, poaching and so on. The crisis runs deeper than the physical natural surroundings. It not only encompasses human life and needs, but also those of all created things. It has to do with the balance and healthiness of spaces in general.

When engaging these concerns, one must take into account the complexity of factors that contribute towards environmental issues. It is important to understand these "in terms of the history of colonialism, globalization, industrialisation and urbanization" (Conradie, 2020:157). Conradie continues:

> They influence the lives of people on a daily basis, for they affect the conditions in which people live and work, the food they eat, the water they drink, the air they breathe. They shape our relationship with the land, with one another, with animals, with what is visible and what is invisible (Conradie, 2020:157).

Therefore, when one speaks of water shortage, energy supply, mining activities or changing climate; one also inevitably speaks of the livelihood of human and non-human communities. This is even more true of Africa and the Global South that will (one could argue already does) bear the brunt of the environmental crisis (Marais, 2011:4). This is why one could underscore the importance of issues like the proposed hydraulic fracturing (fracking) in the Karoo; South Africa's attempt to expand their nuclear powerplants; the countries dependence on coal powered stations and also water security. Because of these connections one can understand environmental concerns as issues of justice (Marais, 2011:4).

It would seem that from within these issues some tensions arise between economic providence, the livelihood of human communities and the preservation of the environment. Articles by the late Gerrit van Tonder and Roger Tucker (2014 & 2015) focussing on fracking in the Karoo, illustrates the challenge of balancing these different concerns. How does one balance these different concerns? What insights can ecotheology share that helps reflect on these issues in the South African context?

3.2.4. An Olive Agenda

When many people hear mention of the environmental cause in South Africa, they first think of well-known fundraisers to save endangered species like the rhino from poachers. These causes have been the focus of many national and international campaigns urging people to buy bracelets, donate money and educate others on the importance of conserving indigenous species. Yet, the essence of environmentalism should go much deeper and wider than just conservation. In a similar manner ecotheology cannot just be concerned with the protection of wildlife and natural habitats. As mentioned above, responsible ecotheology – and any response to the environmental crisis – understands environment holistically.

An important element of ecotheology is the concept of interconnectedness. This interconnectedness is not just confined to relations between humanity and creation, it

transcends to more abstract themes and powers that manifest in environments and contexts. In this way the environment is connected to economy, politics and the social context of all human beings (Conradie, 2020:160). Making this connection is important since it bridges the gap between the natural environment and the human environment of everyday life. Conradie (2020:159) writes that one way of doing this is the work of De Gruchy's Olive Agenda.

In his influential paper titled "An Olive Agenda: First Thoughts on a Metaphorical Theology of Development", the late Steve de Gruchy (2007) offers an integrated approach to the environmental crisis and a theology of development. When reading Beverley Haddad's introduction *Keeping Body and Soul Together: Reflections by Steve de Gruchy on Theology and Development* (2015), one quickly realises the wide impact of De Gruchy's work and leadership, but even more the way in which he interacted with others.[20] He was deeply committed to issues of justice and liberation, and passionate about empowering people on grassroot level (Haddad, 2015:vii-viii). A major theme in De Gruchy's work centres around on the grassroot challenges of South Africans and how to empower local communities to move forward and thrive. De Gruchy drives home the importance of contextual theology and is very critical of notions like sustainable development (addressed later in this study) and how the power dynamics manifests in structures on a global scale between "developed" (Northern/colonial countries) and "underdeveloped" (Southern) countries (De Gruchy, 2015:45). An Olive Agenda incorporates these approaches and formulates an integrated approach to ecology and development.

In the paper De Gruchy (2007:334) focusses on where discourse around economy and ecology intersect, addressing the polarisation of two key agendas in the discussion, namely the "brown agenda" and the "green agenda". The brown agenda is concerned with poverty and therefore deals with economics, bringing into focus the dehumanising impact of poverty as a prevalent reality of the Global South (Conradie, 2020:159). The green agenda is concerned with the conservation of environment that has in the past also been associated as an agenda of those who are not poor (De Gruchy, 2007:335). An Olive Agenda argues that these two concerns are both valid

[20] Further reflections on Steve de Gruchy and his work can be found in *Living on the Edge: Essays in Honour of Steve de Gruchy, Activist & Theologian* (2012).

and important on a global scale but cannot be understood or addressed in isolation. De Gruchy does this by highlighting the complex relationship between these two agendas and the influence they have on everyday life of South Africans. At the end of the article and elsewhere (De Gruchy, 2015:215), he illustrates this by capturing snapshots of daily life in South Africa and other southern countries:

> Charcoal burning is a key form of fuel for millions of poor people, and provides the means to a steady income for many; yet it is a prime contributor to deforestation. […] Close to home, the proposed Wild Coast Highway in the Eastern Cape symbolizes the conflict between the promoters of the brown agenda of jobs, tourism, and trade, against the green agenda of those concerned with indigenous forests. Low-cost housing for many people living in informal settlements is needed on the out- skirts of urban areas, often placing stress on wetlands, green lungs and farm land. The taxi industry is crucial to the livelihoods of great numbers of South Africans, and yet it is built on the continuing consumption of fossil fuels (De Gruchy, 2007:345).

One of the core components of understanding an Olive Agenda is the image of the household of God – or *oikos* (as briefly discussed above) (Konkol, 2015:138). By understanding economy in light of its Greek origin *oikos-nomos* (translated as the rules of the household/home) and ecology as *oikos-logos* (the study of the household/home), De Gruchy (2015:216) underlines the connection between these two agendas. In fact, a key component to understanding this theology is underscoring the connectedness of this household in its entirety (Konkol, 2015:138). Though this study has earlier discussed that the metaphor of Earth as human home is not perfect, this intersection brings to light the very real and physical impact human economic action has on the holistic global environment.

For De Gruchy the metaphor of olive (and an Olive Agenda) is open ended. The idea is to inspire and invigorate a creative interaction that combines the brown and green agendas. He names five preliminary items he would like to place on the agenda: 1) The need to address public policy from an integrated (economy and ecology) viewpoint, 2) to open public debate on the Sabbath, 3) on a theological level start replacing the word ‘land’ with ‘earth’, 4) if the current economy is part of the problem,

start finding another way of ordering the economy and 5) it needs to be an ecumenical task among churches on grassroot level (De Gruchy, 2015:225-226).

However, these contributions where intended to only be preliminary. In his doctoral thesis Brian Konkol (2015) highlights that an Olive Agenda is remarkably underdeveloped (Konkol. 2015:143-144). Konkol's contribution is to incorporate the Olive Agenda as a missiological trajectory for Mission as Accompaniment (Konkol, 2015:137). He does this by arguing the missiological underpinnings of an Olive Agenda and De Gruchy's work (Konkol, 2015:137-139) and delving deeper into the methodology of the agenda, citing the influence of Joseph Cardijin's methodology of "See-Judge-Act", as well as Paulo Freire's education model that utilises the model of "Circle of Praxis" (Konkol, 2015:144-148). The See-Judge-Act in particular has drawn on the work of Latin American Liberation theologians in a process called the "Pastoral Cycle" (Haddad, 2016:3). Van Schalkwyk (2012:110) builds on this work and argues the development of an Olive Agenda into action by integrating it with the *Oikos* Cycle of Care. By using an ecofeminist approach to ethics, she draws on the Deep Ecology[21] movement (a theme that will be discussed in the next chapter) and the Pastoral Cycle, calling for a more integrated understanding of Shalom in our current context (Van Schalkwyk, 2012:99). She writes:

> In this article, I will argue that It is necessary for faith communities to ground their understanding of welfare and wellbeing (SHALOM) in a deep connection with the ecology, and in an experience of the presence of God there, so as to broaden and deepen their practice of welfare and development to encompass the wellbeing of the whole community of living beings (Van Schalkwyk, 2012:99).

De Gruchy uses the richness of metaphorical theology to communicate the complexity of intersecting agendas in different parts of society. By further elaborating on the metaphor of an olive as an ecumenical and Christian image – amongst other things – De Gruchy's work on an Olive Agenda brings home the dire need to have an integrated approach when doing theology (and ecology!) in South Africa. De Gruchy's work invites a creative response to a complexity of challenges and realities; it invites theologians, pastors, scholars, clergy and congregants to search for new and

[21] Through the Deep Ecology Cycle.

imaginative solutions to bridge the immense challenges our country and world faces. Through his representation at the WCC and other organisations, Gruchy's work has not just been a great value to South Africans but has also had an impact on global ecumenical and theological discourses (Haddad, 2015:ix).

In the metaphor of an Olive Agenda there is an image that can be utilised much more, as it roots any discourse on environmental and development in the reality of the South African context. This perspective helps navigate the pitfalls of global politics, policies and rhetoric. It teaches us that theology cannot stay abstract, removed or vague. If an integrated ecotheology is to pass the test it needs to come home – to the home of everyone: the rich and the poor, the privileged and the marginalised, the educated and uniformed, the ignorant and the humble.

3.2.5. In summary

Thus far this chapter has focussed on some ecotheological contributions within the South African context, particularly discussing the work of Conradie and De Gruchy. Conradie's engagement with *Oikos* theology and an integrated approach of the environment flowed into a brief survey of De Gruchy's Olive Agenda. These contributions make a strong point of emphasising an ecotheological approach that takes seriously the relationships and dynamic tensions between the welfare of the human and Earth community. Every social issue has an environmental dimension; one cannot talk environment if one does not talk about poverty, injustice, inequality, health, food security and so forth (Conradie, 2020:160). These are however not just local concerns but situate South Africa in a complex global village. Understanding the environmental crisis in South Africa from this viewpoint is becoming increasingly important.

3.3. Reflecting on the impact of globalisation and development in South Africa

Contributions like an Olive Agenda don't just encourage an integrated approach to addressing the environmental crisis and poverty, they also call for a deep awareness of the life and struggles of everyday people. In many ways it brings the calling of the church into spotlight. Conradie (2020:161) writes that the environment is a public concern and that the environmental crisis is being addressed in the church in multiple

ways. Though environmental degradation and climate change are (or rather should be) important concerns for the local congregation, one needs to remember that it is also part of a bigger narrative. Beyer (2011:24) writes that we live both in local and global society. Addressing environmental issues is therefore not only a local concern but a global one as well. In a well-versed chapter titled “Seeking Eco-Justice in the South African Context” (2001), many authors come together to critically reflect on matters of ecology and justice within the context of South Africa. The chapter does well to outline important imbalances that can be traced back to colonial rule and the country’s checkered history of oppression. Conradie *et.al.* (2001:135) begins the chapter by using four geographical spaces in Cape Town to aid in this reflection, the last being on top of Table Mountain. On top of Table Mountain, they articulate these tensions by reflecting on the view of the city:

> Once at the top we are able to look over the Cape metropolitan area […] to see the city center and its industries, the affluent northern and southwestern suburbs and the vast areas of the Cape Flats, where millions of impoverished people live in squalid houses, shacks, and on rubbish dumps. We look down upon a sea of contradictory representations in geography and architecture: They represent injustice and the struggle for justice, poverty and the struggle for well-being, dehumanization and the search for a fuller human being, degradation and the desire for a clean and whole environment (Conradie *et.al.*, 2001:136).

The chapter continues to argue that after 1994 the public debate in South Africa has shifted from political liberation to economic liberation with many still caught in a web of poverty and literacy (Conradie *et.al.,* 2001:137). They continue by situating the country in this respect as a “low-income, highly indebted, developing country with insufficient recourses to deal with its problems and needs, and considerable vulnerability to international markets and financial speculation” (Conradie *et.al.,* 2001:137). This reflection situates South African challenges both within its local and international context. This vulnerability Conradie *et.al.* speak of, is a symptom of a bigger global economic inequality which also plays an important role in the worldwide environmental crisis. Within this international crisis one finds the convergence of the green and brown agendas on a global scale. The effects of global politics, economy and policy in some way impacts the livelihoods in countries like South Africa. In

addressing this, one could argue that a contribution like the Accra Confession might aid the church in navigating these complex issues.

3.3.1. Accra Confession: Environment, poverty and global injustice

The Accra confession was created by the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) and is by no means the first attempt to address environmental and justice issues on a global scale. Effort has been made since the 1980's by organisations like the World Council of Churches (WCC). Arguably most notable at their Sixth Assembly in Vancouver, Canada in 1983 with the theme of Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation (Plaatjies-Van Huffel, 2013:1). Subsequent meetings and gatherings have placed growing emphasis on environmental justice issues. Yet, one could argue that the Accra Confession (2004) captured the essence of these struggles in a way that was more articulated to the African context.

The build-up to the document released by the WARC after the gathering of its General Council in Accra, Ghana in 2004, happened over a few years. The creation of the document was the culmination of a long process spanning over 21 years (Pillay, 2018:1). WARC's engagement with the issue of economic justice is one that has been a topic of discussion at many gatherings over time, with the conversation gathering momentum and getting more nuanced at every subsequent assembly. In the mid 1990's it became obvious that Christians all over the world had a different understanding of economic justice (Pillay, 2018:1). One of the most important moments in the process being the 1995 conference in Kitwe where the Southern African constituency raised serious and urgent concern to global economic and environmental injustice (WARC, 2005:para. 1). It is at this time that the Belhar confession played a role in light of world events, bringing forth the realisation that unjust economic systems were not just an ethical problem but a theological one (Pillay, 2018:1). One can find echoes of the Belhar Confession (1982/1986) in Accra's statement that:

> We believe that God is a God of justice. In a world of corruption, exploitation and greed, God is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor, the exploited, the wronged and the abused (Ps 146.7-9). God calls for just relationships with all creation (WARC, 2005:para. 24).

The document known today as the Accra Confession[22] strongly confesses the injustice and exploitation of humans and the environment – highlighting historic and modern-day exploits as structural misuse of power for economic gain while the poor suffer (WARC, 2005:para. 14). The confession places a strong focus on global power structures, laying the blame for the current unjust economic system at the foot of global neo-liberal capitalism (WARC, 2005:para. 19). The confession warns against the current economic system, citing its devastation aftermath in the lives of the poor and their surrounding environment (WARC, 2005:para. 25).

Though the document draws a lot of attention on economic exploitation – especially in reference to the dignity of the poor and destitute – important links are made with ecology and the impact of this imperfect system on the environment. Most noteworthy are references to the household of God's economy (2005:para. 22), mention of God's covenant that is includes all of creation (2005:para. 10), a sharp criticism of unchecked capitalism and unlimited growth (2005:para. 21) and the notion of stewardship (2005:para. 34). In these statements one can see the convergence of the green and brown agendas. These are therefore not just issues of policy and global markets but can be linked with concerns of life and lifestyle (Marais, 2011:18). A point that Marais (2011:18) also argues as prevalent in *Dreaming A Different World* (2010) that was created in response to the challenge of the Accra Confession for congregations. Yet, despite numerous efforts engaging these concerns, it still does not enjoy the attention it deserves. Marais writes:

> Ecological concerns are, however, often still marginalised in the public agendas of politicians, economists, and public consciousness or imagination. Although the South African constitution provides for the recognition of the need for a healthy environment, many still view the preservation of the environment as a luxury of the rich and powerful. This often heightens the tension between protecting scarce resources and the care and development of human lives. Ecojustice issues (which want to acknowledge that systems and practices of injustice involve both economic and ecological exploitation) are core to

[22] Not a doctoral confession, as the WARC acknowledges that it cannot become part of the official confession basis.

> discussions on human dignity, as well as the integrity of creation (Marais, 2011:19).

The Accra confession is not without its critique (see the DRC's response to the document in latter part of this chapter), yet the importance of this document in its time and context offer valuable insights. At play are deeper tensions and powers. A document like the Accra Confession, brings the plight of the Global South into the limelight. It challenges an imbalanced approach that has had far reaching consequences for humans and the Earth. It highlights inequality between affluent countries – who have gained privilege, power and richness by historical exploitation of humans, countries and natural recourses – and less privileged countries from the that are still unable to truly break the bonds and ties with systems that have engineered dependency within the global economy for survival.

One important (and contentious) term the document uses is that of "empire". This term is used to invoke a strong response and underline the extent of injustice the confession tries to highlight. The term also holds interesting potential when engaging the Earth-human relations and the use of human force and power as dominion over creation.

3.3.2. Understanding empire and power dynamics

The Accra confession uses the term 'empire' to address economic inequality and the theme of global power dynamics (WARC, 2005:para. 19). In point 11 of the document the WARC unpacks the term:

> We recognize the enormity and complexity of the situation. We do not seek simple answers. As seekers of truth and justice and looking through the eyes of powerless and suffering people, we see that the current world (dis)order is rooted in an extremely complex and immoral economic system defended by empire. In using the term "empire" we mean the coming together of economic, cultural, political and military power that constitutes a system of domination led by powerful nations to protect and defend their own interests (WARC, 2005:para. 11).

Delving deeper into the notion of empire, Jerry Pillay (2018) unpacks it's meaning and use in his article "The Accra Confession as a response to empire". In the article Pillay (2018:4) raises some tension in response to the confession's use of the term.

According to Pillay (2018:4) the Evangelical Reformed Church in Germany (ERCG) questioned what exactly was meant by the use of empire in the confession. Within this inquiry and discussion, it became apparent that a strong connection was being made between the European churches and the very imperial system that was being critiqued (Pillay, 2018:4). This inquiry gave rise to some tension between the ERCG and URCSA, that later lead to a joint project between the two churches in 2006 named the Globalisation Project with the purpose of engaging in dialogue over key issues within the Accra Confession (Plaatjies-Van Huffel, 2017:29).

In his article “Theological Reflections on Empire”, Boesak (2009) defends the use of the term empire, stating that the confession depicts the realities and signs of our times, arguing that the world and church faces these challenges in what he calls the new Rome (Boesak, 2009:645). Boesak (2009:646) takes a very critical stance when he further unpacks this by naming the United States of America (USA) itself as the entity encompassing this “new Rome”. According to Boesak (2009:646) the Accra confession embodies a deep critique of the borderless American empire and its exercise of power. One could however argue that although the USA stands as a symbol of empire, that the critique of the Accra confession runs far deeper and wider – criticising manifestations of abuse of power in a variety of contexts. Connecting the notion of empire to a single force or entity could take away from the suffering of those under the yoke of other abuses of power and could even oversimplify shortcomings in a global system of imbalance.

Another author to engage these topics is Davids (2013) in her thesis entitled “An Assessment of Recent Ethical Discourses on Globalization: Comparing the Critique of Joseph Stiglitz on Global Capital with Ecumenical Globalization Debates on the Accra Declaration”. In the thesis Davids (2013:16-43) critically discusses the Accra confession against the backdrop of globalisation and the idea of empire. Early on Davids (2013:16) notes that not all are in agreement of the existence of empire. However, Davids does examining the term from many different perspectives and engages with Boesak, writing:

> Boesak suggests that it will serve us well to remember that the reality of globalization is unthinkable without the reality of the forces that drive it. He states that first among them is global capitalism, followed closely by military,

> political and cultural forms of domination. These are indeed systems of mutual reinforcement and cohesion coming together to realise the aims of self-interest on behalf of the rich nations of the world and the rich elite in poor countries. The combined substance of these forces is what is called empire (Davids, 2013:37).

Therefore, one could understand the term empire as a descriptive one that encompasses the elements the Accra confession critiques. Moreover, these elements are articulated by abuse of power, consumerism and inequality of a select few over the plight of voiceless masses. This abuse of power manifests not only in governments by also in multi-national corporations that have immense power in the global market. Often these companies gain economic prosperity by exploiting the less privileged. Northcott (2014:120) is very critical of this and often focusses on what he calls in one of his chapters the “Cult of Carbon”. Northcott (2014:121-122) examines the ideas of so called “carbon credits” that essentially enables industries and countries to offset their carbon emissions to “less developed” countries, effectively locking them into fossil fuel based economic growth. This enables the largest contributors of pollution to continue their practices and lifestyles by simply offsetting their pollution (Northcott, 2014:122). This inefficient system has resulted in a lucrative economy within itself that does not address the issue of environmental crisis as intended. Instead it has become a way for wealthy nations and corporations to avoid real or tangible accountability for its contribution to global environmental crisis.

One could further elaborate on the impact, language and intention of the Accra Confession. The importance of it for this study however lies in the response it evokes and its challenge to unjust structures that overreach boundaries to the detriment of the whole Earth community. Documents like these remind the church (and world) of a complex global history entangled in themes of domination and violence through colonialist conquests. These are by no means problems of the past as structures and privilege that have been gained by these conquests have left serious imbalances. Many movements like Black Lives Matter (BLM) and #FeesMustFall uncover racial discrimination, economic and racial inequality embodied by the imbalance of social structures. This underscores the importance of contributions in liberation theology for the contemporary context.

These tensions can be felt on a macro level as well. In time of writing this study the world is currently in the midst of the global COVID-19 pandemic. During this period focus has also been placed on how the pandemic affect different demographics and communities. A trend seems to be observed that the privileged are more equipped to protect themselves from the surge of Coronavirus cases in communities compared to those that are part of the poor and vulnerable minorities (CDC, 2020). This also seems true in countries' capacities to enforce lockdown procedures, economic incentives and aid. South Africa being an important example of this with lockdown enforcement nearly impossible in townships, whilst the devastating economic effect has forced the country to negotiate a $4.2 billion loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to manage the crisis, whilst still paying back a $3.75 billion loan to the World Bank (Bloomberg, 2020). One could say that the COVID-19 pandemic exposes inequality and imbalances that where already present in communities. Never has the disparity in people's ability to react to a crisis been so visible.

In a thesis done by Juanita Greyvenstein (2018) titled "Planetary Health in the Anthropocene: Sharing Agency in the Body of God", Greyvenstein addresses important themes concerning power and how it is manifested in the environmental crisis and society. She raises the point that the geographic and economic factors used to explain global degradation of the environment does not "accurately illustrate and explicate the unequal power relations that lead to vast inequalities both on local, regional and global scale" (Greyvenstein, 2018:20). Discussing Sallie McFague's concept of the universe as the body of God (which will be further discussed in chapter four), Greyvenstein raises crucial issues of planetary boundaries, embodiment, power and gender in the Anthropocene. Her discussion on planetary boundaries is relevant to this section. Addressing terms of sustainable development and people's tendencies to translate it to the metaphor of stewardship, she writes:

> This call does however not redress the immense inequalities in impact on the Earth system. It enforces an unwavering trust in human ingenuity, a high anthropology, and obscures the imbalance in global power relations (Greyvenstein, 2018:24).

At this point is might help to have a closer look at how these tensions manifest in discussions centring around development. This can be done by having a closer look

at sustainable development which has long been a buzzword used in global talks on the environmental crisis and global consumption.

3.3.3. The paradox of (un)sustainable development

To start, some authors like De Gruchy (2015:171) criticises the use of distinctions of 'developed' and 'undeveloped' countries. He states that the use of these terms can be seen as direct replacement of 'colonised' and 'uncolonized' (De Gruchy, 2015:171). Through this type of nuanced understanding – and economic structures that keep impoverished nations dependent on 'developed' countries – countries like South Africa can never be truly free and independent. One could argue that referring to countries as developing has just become a euphemism for poverty whilst hiding the continued legacy of imperialism, colonialism and empire (Conradie, 2016:2). Conradie (2016:10) argues for dropping the term altogether in favour of a different language and metaphor; proposing the use of "maturation". It is important to note the difference in approach and how language has a way of saying more than it leads on. Using a term like maturing for instance focusses more on the self, rather than external comparison to be "first world" or "developed". Understanding the global language and metaphor of development, one starts to get a greater understanding of underlining power dynamics. It is within this complex system of global relations and power structures De Gruchy (2015:47) does feel that it is important for Africa to be responsible for its own development and not continue to play the part of victim in the global arena. However, He also emphasises that within this context of colonialism and neo-colonialism, "Africa *is* a victim and *continues* to be victimised by globalisation" (De Gruchy, 2015:47).

Perhaps a big part of the problem lies in the notion of development itself. Development is centred around economic growth and progress. The tension however arises when the whole human population wants to aspire to the paradigm of modern and developed nations. The Earth simply does not have the recourses to sustain such infinite growth. To balance this many have adapted an approach of sustainable development. The well know document published by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) – and accepted United Nations (UN) – titled "Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future" (1987), lays the framework for a sustainable development of nations. The report defines sustainable development as:

> Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (WCED, 1987:1)

The idea of sustainability is a notion that has gained much more traction over the last few decades, leading to the development of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) in 2015. The SDG build on the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and aims to address many of the issues the MDG have raised by 2030 with a bigger focus on sustainability. Though many see this focus on sustainability as an important shift in global policy, many are sceptical of this approach; asking if the challenges that have given rise to the environmental crisis as well as human inequality and poverty can be fixed by the same economic system that has created it (De Gruchy, 2015:219). One of these voices is Leonardo Boff. In his book *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, Boff (1997) is very critical of the notion of Sustainable Development. He believes sustainable development is a contradiction altogether (Boff, 1997:67), arguing that the whole notion of development inherently means it cannot be sustainable (Boff, 1997:65). Boff writes the following in response to *Our Common Future* and sustainable development:

> The idea incorporates ecological reason, but as is clear from the terms used, it still remains a captive of the development-and-growth paradigm, which is assumed to be inherently valid. No matter which terms are tagged onto such development, whether *self-sustaining* or *self-generating*, it never gets away from its economic origins, namely rising productivity, accumulation, and technological innovation (Boff, 1997:66).

Following this Boff makes an important point that underlines the discussing thus far:

> The report's assumption […] is that poverty and ecological deterioration mutually affect one another and occur in tandem. What pollutes, so the though goes, is extreme poverty. Therefore, the more development advances, the less dire poverty there will be, and the less dire poverty there is the less pollution there will be, to the betterment of ecology (Boff, 1997:66).

Reading this highlights the disparity in thought. Using the logic as Boff outlines shows its problematic nature, seeing as the USA is both the biggest consumer and historic

polluter globally (Northcott, 2013:122). It ignores the elephant in the room: That matured countries and economies (often bolstered and supported by a consumer driven market) need to be held accountable for their stake in the environmental crisis and global economic inequality. To some the need to solve these problems with an economic approach is only slowing down the process. In his book *A Political Theology of Climate Change*, Michael Northcott (2013) addresses themes of empire, global power dynamics and politics as intertwined with the environment. In the volume he lays a big part of the blame for the environmental crises at the feet of multi-national corporations and criticised the need to continue finding solutions for the crisis in market-based approaches (Northcott, 2013:304). Northcott (2013:304) feels that these approaches stand no chance of holding corporations accountable for the harm that they do to the environment. He writes that there is "a conflict between the corporate and imperial agencies of global industrial capitalism and the health of the planet, people, and species" (Northcott, 2013:304-305). For Northcott (2013:305) the solution (or part of it at least) lies in a new system that is accentuated by a collective of bottom-up and small-scale responses.

Diefenbacher (2011:82) writes that humanity has not adequately calculated the true cost of the environment and therefore has to develop a new way of ecological bookkeeping. The current economic system is incapable of adapting in a way that leaves everyone with enough to survive; it does not take into account the reduction in economic growth that is needed for the rest to grow (Diefenbacher, 2011:82).[23] The idea that other countries can mature and grow economically (and physically) to the level akin to 'first world countries' is not realistic and leaves countries like South Africa with the short end of the stick without intervention.

All the above mentioned culminates in a context where countries like South Africa are fighting onslaughts from both sides with their hands effectively tied behind their backs. On the one hand there is a need to grow and thrive economically (whilst battling the injustices and inequality from historical oppression and exploitation) whilst trying to adhere to sustainable practices that are environmentally friendly. These challenges also boil down to the livelihoods of the country's citizens. In his article titled "Modern

[23] Another author that calls for a new economic paradigm that might be worth mentioning is Nürnberger (1999:6) in his book *Prosperity, Poverty & Pollution: Managing the Approaching Crisis*.

slavery in the post-1994 South Africa? A critical ethical analysis of the National Development Plan promises for unemployment in South Africa", systematic theologian Vuyani Vellem (2014) addresses South Africa's National Development Plan (NDP). At the offset Vellem – who is known for his engagement with Black Theology of Liberation (BTL) – is suspicious of the NDP's approach to job creation. Engaging with the "Alternative globalization addressing people and earth" (or AGAPE) (2007) and the Accra Confession, Vellem (2014:6) is critical of neoliberal economics and how it manifests in the NDP. He argues that the NDP focusses on cheap labour and misconstrues what work or labour means within the African context, even going as far as calling it modern slavery (Vellem, 2014:1). In response Vellem (2014:2) engages alternative themes *ikhaya* versus *oikos* and *umsebenzi* as opposed to labour. He writes:

> Work, or *umsebenzi*, is for God or gods ultimately; work without God is the definition of slavery in my interpretation of the African ethical value system. If one succeeds from that understanding to define what slavery is, then God-lessness in work might imply the need for us to search for the gods of modernity post-1994 that have dethroned God, if they have not disentangled work from God (Vellem, 2014:1).

Vellem continues:

> In this long history of African entrapment by the West, the loss of the understanding of the black African concept of *umsebenzi* [work], which is sacramental in nature, was violent and racist. This is what the picture of *umsebenzi* entails on the underside of colonial and apartheid regimes in our land (Vellem, 2014:3).

The article concludes by noting that *umsebenzi* in South Africa remains trapped in a "history of logic" that violates the individual (Vellem, 2014:8). What is the impact of this theology on our engagement with the environment? One could argue that it further affirms an economic system that is imbalanced and unequipped to truly value humans and natural recourses as anything more than an economic recourse.

3.3.4. In summary

In summary, an integrated approach is needed in addressing issues of human and environmental injustice. The current systems and approaches are imbalanced favouring the powerful and rich, whilst leaving the rest with a small voice, unable to thrive in a system that has been designed around principles of unlimited growth. Attempting to attain wealth and an acceptable standard of living, leaves many powerless and stuck. These issues are in many ways embodied by the struggle of every-day South Africans. It is important for the church to take a lead in being a voice for those who are voiceless. In the words of De Gruchy:

> The church needs to know about these things and to understand them far more deeply than it does at present; but the role of the church is to preach the gospel, and if the gospel has anything worth saying to the world at this time, then it must be the good news about how we get out of the mess (De Gruchy, 2015:139).

Furthermore, it is important to note the relationships between inequality, poverty and colonialism in South Africa's history and the manifestation thereof in contemporary society. This is a sensitive and uncomfortable topic for many, but as seen in the discussion in this chapter thus far, it cannot be ignored. It's not just a problem of economy or ecology: it is a problem of people and the livelihood of the environment and community in its entirety. Therefore, no response to the environmental crisis will pass the test if it does not give agency to the voices of the poor and the oppressed. If the church and country does not learn to truly integrate the green and brown agendas, then we cannot hope to have the transformation that is needed to answer the unprecedented challenge of environmental catastrophe.

This study will now shift gears, turning its focus from the South African context to the Dutch Reformed Church itself. This study wants to argue that taking time to understand the complexity of an integrated approach to environment is pivotal when engaging ecotheology in DRC. It not presents important points in the discussion, but also holds the denomination accountable for its response. It not only outlines the wider landscape the DRC finds itself in but could pose important and critical questions in surveying ecotheology within the DRC.

3.4. Possible origins of an ecological awareness in the DRC

The DRC's response to the environmental crisis is hard to place in many ways. Not much has been documented on the denominations journey with the environmental affairs or ecotheology apart from dialogue and reports at different synodical levels. This study would like to propose that the church's main responses to the environmental crisis can summed up in the following elements. Firstly – and most notable for this study – through the engagement with the topic of ecotheology and environmental concerns in the denomination's highest body of governance, the DRC General Synod. This can be observed particularly in the agendas and notes of its quintenary synod gatherings. One could also include the church's public response to fracking and nuclear energy in partnership with other churches as part of this. Secondly, through publications by Reformed academics that form a part of the DRC. This includes published articles, recourses, books and so forth. Thirdly, discussions through the church's newspaper called the *Kerkbode*, which includes articles, letters discussions. Engagement on social media platforms and website can also be included in this section. Lastly, through task teams that are in service of general and/or regional synods. Finding sources outlining this journey is challenging as no one has documented it in its entirety. This study will therefore try to give a brief overview by mainly focussing on the agendas (and in some places the notes) of DRC General Synod meetings. One could argue that focussing on the highest level of leadership in the denomination will give an outlined understanding of ecotheology within the church.

3.4.1. Ecology and ecotheology in the General Synod of the DRC

The first General Synod meeting of the DRC was held in 1962 in Cape Town. Taking the time to read through the agendas and minutes of these meetings, one quickly gets to grips with the church's early theology, as well as it's colonial heritage and identity. These documents also stand as a testament to the enormous change the church has underwent over the years. Searching through these documents for any mention of ecology and environment proved to be a tedious task. To roughly get an idea of the General Synod's engagement with ecotheological matters, this study proposes a brief quantitative survey of synod's agendas and minutes that will simply look at the occurrence and/or repetition of certain ecotheological terms and themes.

This will be done in a thoughtful manner and will simply be used as an aid the discussion. The recurrence and repetition of words might aid getting a better understanding of the prevalence and progression of discourse on environmental matters within the synod. One could argue for the use of ecology (*ekologie*) and environment (*omgewing*). It must be noted however that the Afrikaans word for environment is translated with the word “omgewing”, which can mean physical environment or surroundings of environment as we speak of today. Yet, when surveying these documents, the idea of physical space is rarely used in these documents in reference to creation, nature or environment. Instead it is used in reference to situations, contexts and space. The use of creation (*skepping*) must also be noted, but also poses its own challenges, given its use in discourses on marriage, social order and homosexuality.

As the term ecotheology is a relatively new one and so too the popular and contemporary use of the word ecology (as discussed in chapter two), searching for ecology in these documents might also aid in seeing the progression of the discourse. Therefore, this study will only use the root word of *ekologie* for the purposes of this very brief quantitative survey. Lastly, it must be noted that this survey will mainly focus on the agendas as to better gauge if these terms have been placed within the official outlined discussion (rather than it being a reference from a discussion from the floor). Though the notes were also consulted, only references found in the agendas have been tabled.

The first time any of these words are used in reference to the environmental crisis in one of these documents, was during the fifth General Synod in 1978 held in Bloemfontein. In the notes of the meeting a single reference is made to ecology as part of a team focusing on serving those in industry (more specifically in the rail industry) known as the *Breë Kommissie vir Nywerheidsbediening soos gerig op die Spoorweë* (BKNS) (NGK-AS Agenda, 1978:621). It reads:

> Aandag moet gegee word aan aangeleenthede soos arbeidsetiek, ekologie, produktiwiteit, die verhouding tussen werkgewer en werknemer en die invloed van die industrie op die sielkundige sosiologiese, kulturele en die godsdienstige lewe van die werker en sy gesin (NGK-AS Notule, 1978:908).

The reference simply states that attention must be paid to the conditions and environment of those working in the rail industry but also goes further to name things like ecology, work ethics and the relationship between employee and employer as things that have an effect on worker's immediate environment. After this mention any speak of environment or ecology disappears till 1990, subsequently growing part of every General Synod meeting thereafter (only excluding the 2016 special synod on homosexuality). Mapping the frequency of the word ecology in agendas helps create a picture of how the environmental issues has become a more important concern for the church over the decade. This table (Table 1) and subsequent chart (Chart 1) shows how many times ecology and environment is mentioned in the agenda of the quintenary General Synod meetings[24]:

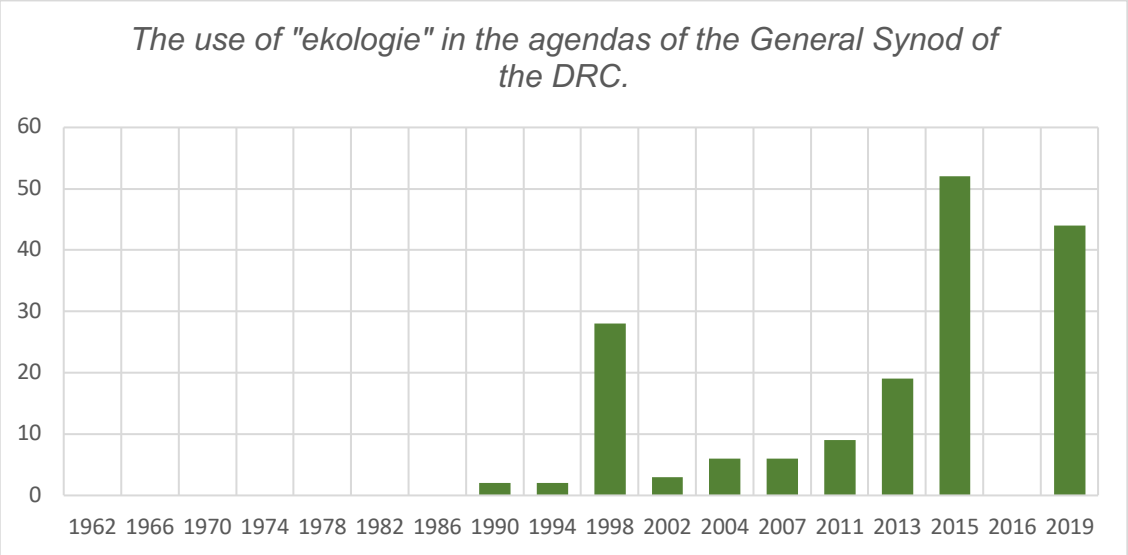
Year	Frequency
1962	0
1966	0
1970	0
1974	0
1978	0
1982	0
1986	0
1990	2
1994	2
1998	28
2002	3
2004	6
2007	6
2011	9
2013	19
2015	52
2016[25]	0
2019	44

Table 3.4.1.1: The frequency of the use of "ekologie" in the agendas of the General Synod of the DRC, indicated by year.

Looking at these mentions more closely helps paint a better picture when it comes to the DRC's involvement with ecological issues. When looking at the data one can see a big jump in 1994/1998 (26 more mentions), 2011/2013 (10 more mentions) and

[24] The raw data of these findings will be displayed in Addendum A at the end of this study.
[25] Special synod gathered to discuss the acceptance of homosexuality within the church and it's leaders.

2011/2015 (10 more menstions). This is by no means a holistic or conclusive statement; it only helps the reader to identify possible patterns. One could argue that understanding these meetings within context might partly explain the jump in mentions. In light of ecology becoming a topic of discussion at the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP), the South African Council of Churches (SACC) and the World Council of Churches (WCC), the DRC tasked the *Algemene Kommissie vir Leer en Aktuele Sake* (AKLAS) to create a report on the environmental crisis in 1998.



Graph 3.4.1.1: The frequency of the use of "ekologie" in the agendas of the General Synod of the DRC, indicated by year.

The increase in mentions in 2013 marked the publishing of a framework document on ecology by the church titled "Ter Wille van die Aarde en Haar Bewoners", while the 2015 synod was known as the "Groen Sinode" (the green synod). Another synod that is worth noting for this study is the one held in 2007 that formulates an official reply by the church to the ACCRA confession as part of a task team called *Profesie oor Profyt* (Prophecy over Profit). This section will give a brief overview of these meetings, the content of these documents and the decisions made thereafter.

3.4.2. 1998: First steps

Leading up to the tenth meeting of the General Synod of the DRC in 1998, AKLAS was tasked with creating a report outlining the environmental crisis. The three page report (NGK-AS Agenda, 1998:80-83) gives an outline of the environmental crisis by firstly introducing themes of ecology and *oikos* (A.3.D.1.2) then by looking at the effects of the crisis globally (A.3.D.1.3.1) and locally (A.3.D.1.3.2), while briefly

concentrating at its causes (A.3.D.1.3.3). The report then shifts focus to the church and its response (A.3.D.1.4), culminating in four recommendations (A.3.D.1.5).

The report is well versed and uses a language and approach that is very conscious of the interconnectedness of all created beings (A.3.D.1.2, A.3.D.1.3) while being honest about the fact that humans are solely responsible for the global crisis (A.3.D.1.3.3). While acknowledging that the DRC has been silent about environmental issues up till now (A.3.D.1.1), the report addresses important theological themes that lie central to the church's response to the environmental crisis. The report makes it clear that a huge part of the problem is that the message of the gospel has been diminished to a spiritual theology only focussed on human faith, emphasising transcendence and undervaluing our material reality (A.3.D.1.4.1). The response to this is to confess our guilt (A.3.D.1.4.2) and revisit key texts such as Gen 1 (A.3.D.1.4.3) to help revise our understanding of humanity's call to 'have dominium' (A.3.D.1.4.4) over creation, while reorienting our perspective on humanity's place on Earth (A.3.D.1.4.5, A.3.D.1.4.6) and within God's story (A.3.D.1.4.7). The document draws to an end by stating that the church has to respond by beginning conversations on the holistic nature of the Gospel and that the church should lead by restorative deeds that can become testimonies of restoration (A.3.D.1.4.8).

This document serves as an important first step for the DRC on its ecological journey, but one might ask what the true impact of it was? Though the report is well put together and shows signs of a positive ecotheology; one could question the recommendations it leaves (A.3.D.1.5) with the General Synod, as it doesn't appear to propose real actionable changes. Rather it only encourages ministers to preach and teach congregants on human's responsibility to care for nature (A.3.D.1.5.1) – specifically on the Sunday closest to World Environmental Day (A.3.D.1.5.3); acknowledge and support those who are involved with addressing the crisis (A.3.D.1.5.2); while making a statement that greed and materialism are the core roots of environmental exploitation (A.3.D.1.5.4). The document makes an important point about the need to confess our guilt and contribution to the crisis (A.3.D.1.4.2) but does not help the church in articulating this confession or encouraging congregations to go into a process of discernment or introspection on how the church or its congregants have contributed (and still do) to the issue. Moreover, no practical guidance is given to

churches or ministers on how to actively discern how local communities could be part of a solution or actionable deeds of hope.

One could argue this report to be an important stepping stone, introducing the church to the language it needs to start having conversations on a complex topic. It however fails to be actionable in concrete and practical ways; failing to address grassroot contexts in a tangible way. It would be another five years before the church would release a clear framework on the church's approach to the issue with the release of "Ter Wille van die Aarde en Haar Bewoners".

3.4.3. 2007: Prophecy over profit

At a previous General Synod in 2004 a task team named *Profesie oor Profyt* was established by the General Synod Komission (ASK) in order to aid the *Algemene Diensgroep vir Diensgetuienis* (ADD) (Working Group on Ministry and Witness) in formulating a response to the WARC's Accra Confession for the 2007 General Synod (NGK-AS Agenda, 2007:360-370). The task team specifically focussed on socio-economic concerns within the South African context – such as theological underpinnings of economic justice (A.4.1.4.4), the church's engagement with social services (A.4.1.4.5.1), NGO's (A.4.1.4.5.2) and the basic income grant (A.4.1.4.5.2.1) – but also focussed on the systematic injustice of the economic system globally. As part of the report section six focusses on the environment. The report celebrates different partnerships of churches in search of addressing the environmental crisis, while urging that any future work of the task team will have to focus on issues of environment in partnership with the ADD (NGK-AS Agenda, 2007:366). The report also states that members of the church should be implored to look into developing alternative lifestyles (NGK-AS Agenda, 2007:366).

The report also takes a good amount of time discussing the economic aspects of the Accra confession but without too much integration with the environmental crisis. A big focus falls on the use of scripture in the confession (2007:367), discussing the global economic system and the scapegoating thereof (2007:368) and the use of the term empire (2007:368). The decisions that are made includes urging the task team to investigate ways and technologies that can help church members live a more sustainable lifestyle (A.4.1.4.8.2.1.1), work in partnership with other organisations and churches on climate related (A.4.1.4.8.2.1.2) and ecological issues (A.4.1.4.8.2.1.3),

whilst urging theological seminaries to educate prospective ministers in economics (A.4.1.4.8.2.1.4).

Though the report sees the importance of the confession, one could ask if it fails to fully understand the confession's intent? Could the report have done more in unpacking the depth of the profound imbalances left by economic exploitation; thereby better understanding the confession's call to formulate an alternative economic system? Though the report engages with the confession well, could one argue the response to be lacking in some ways? Or perhaps cautious to fully commit or go into deeper dialogue on these sensitive topics? The result of the report is again the acceptance of statements that remain theoretical and lack practical traction. Whilst denominations like the URCSA's engagement with the confession led into a process of engagement and dialogue with the Evangelical Reformed Church of Germany and a subsequent creation of materials for Bible study and preaching (Plaatjies-Van Huffel, 2013:7); the DRC's response leaves one wanting for practical action and guidance. It seems that the decisions that are made only encourages the task team to further journey with the subject matter and not the church as a whole. Though the decision was made to continue the work of the task team (A.4.1.4.8.2.3), any reference to them at the next General Synod is nowhere to be found.

3.4.4. 2013: For the sake of the Earth and her inhabitants

The 15th meeting of the DRC General Synod of 2013 marks an important milestone in the church's ecological journey. During the synod held in Port Elisabeth a framework document was accepted, outlying the denomination's stance on the environmental crisis and the its role in establishing an ecological reformation of sorts. The document entitled "Ter Wille van die Aarde en Haar Bewoners" was compiled by the newly formed general task team for ecology. The formation of this task team symbolises a significant change in the church's commitment towards addressing the environmental crisis.

The document (NGK-AS Agenda, 2013:216-217) takes a strong stance economic inequality and injustice, while acknowledging consumerism's role in violence against nature (A.12.8.1). The text states that the church is called to react prophetically, uncover and address the sin that has led humanity to this point, namely: self-centredness, greed, the hunger for power, alienation, idolatry and heresy. The task

team acknowledges that the DRC itself has supported structures and systems that have not honoured the environment in a just way. The church is called to confess and commit itself anew to a sustainable life for all (NGK-AS Agenda, 2013:216).

The middle section speaks the clearest about the church's reaction to the crisis, stating that the church is called to do whatever it can within its capacity. By focusing on what is in reach of being done the church should join the entire society in looking for solutions to environmental problems. Part of this search is changing our own ways and reforming as individuals, but also as the body of Christ. The document reads:

> Die geloofwaardigheid en integriteit van hierdie vorms van getuienis verg van die NG Kerk 'n wydverspreide hervorming wat elke aspek van die kerk se werksaamhede raak: die manier waarop ons die Bybel lees, hoe ons die kerk se geskiedenis beoordeel en herwin, hoe ons die Christelike leerstellings en simbole verstaan, ons morele besluitneming, die beoefening van deugde, die Christelike lewe en roeping, bedieninge in die kerk, die viering van die liturgie, prediking, pastoraat, Christelike opvoeding en lering en getuienis teenoor andere. Die NG Kerk sal maniere moet vind om lidmate te begelei sodat hierdie hervorming sal deurwerk na hulle daaglikse lewe en beroepe waar hulle deelneem aan die vormgewing van die verhoudinge met God, tussen mense, en met die skepping, in alle sektore van ons samelewing. Die NG Kerk bely dat só 'n voortgaande hervorming nie vreemd is aan die tradisie waarin ons staan nie, maar ook dat ons soms stadig is om die rigting te sien waarin die Gees van God ons lei en dat ons self dikwels die noodsaak van só 'n hervoming [*sic*] in eiebelang weerstaan (NGK-AS Agenda, 2013:216).

An ecological reform thus entails changing the way we live, our faith and worship in its totality. It is a change that needs to happen in every aspect of our lives at every level if we are to do anything about the environmental crisis. The document continues by confessing that this reformation must build on a foundation of a renewed vision of justice, peace, collaboration and ecological wholeness (NGK-AS Agenda, 2013:216). "Dit is 'n visie waarin God bely word as 'n God van ontferming, medelye en daarom ook van geregtigheid. Dit is dié God wat ons in Jesus Christus en deur die werk van die Heilige Gees leer ken het" (NGK-AS Agenda, 2013:216).

The decisions that where taken in light of this document include: the acceptance of the document as a framework document (A.12.8.2.1); encouraging congregants, churches, regions and synods to change (A.12.8.2.2) by embracing a lifestyle of simplicity (A.12.8.2.2.1); to integrate themes of environment and lifestyle changes in all forms of church life (A.12.8.2.2.2); to be a prophetic voice, while facing the crisis ecumenically in partnerships with churches, NGO's and other community partners (A.12.8.2.2.3). The task team was also instructed to formulate a statement on the church's position on hydraulic fracking (A.12.8.2.3).

This document outlines the roadmap for the DRC's ecological journey in the future. It is honest about the dire situation humans have created as well as the churches role and responsibility in being a prophetic witness in word and deed. The paper rightly emphasises the role of our individual choices in everyday life and role Christians can play in creating an alternative world. The call for reform is an important invitation to not only established church structures but to everyone who worships in their local community. The change is holistic and connected to our very way of life and being. Yet, one could argue that the decisions taken in response to this framework are again lacking in adequately guiding and equipping grassroot leaders to facilitate an ecological reformation (or revival). Once more the onus falls on local congregations to decide for themselves and act from within capabilities. This is good in that it gives agency to the local church, but one could argue that it is not supported with a strategy to increase the capacity of community leadership. One could also argue that agreeing on a document or accepting a framework does not automatically equate to measurable change in the lives and convictions of individuals. One must ask the question of how the church expects the message to be translated to lives of faith communities?

3.4.5. 2015: A missed opportunity?

Four years later the DRC took the bold step of declaring the 16th meeting of the General Synod as the "Green Synod". Yet, the 2015 synod has in subsequent years not been remembered for its focus on being less wasteful or more ecological. In the following years the meeting is best known for its decisions on homosexuality. The discussion over the role and calling of homosexual members and ministers of the church has been a central point of discussion in the subsequent years. The decisions taken by the General Synod led to some conflict that warranted the calling of a special

synod in 2016 to solely address the matter. Thought the importance of the church's journey with welcoming all forms of sexual orientation, one might ask the question if this could have been a missed opportunity for the church to really bring home the centrality of the environmental crisis.

In this meeting of the General Synod, ecology enjoyed its own point on the agenda, giving the ecology task team more space to address the synod. According to the report delivered, the framework document from 2013's synod has led the way for this General Synod to be set up as a green synod (NGK-AS Agenda, 2015:396). According to the agenda this means making plans to recycle paper, plastic, glass and tin used at the assembly (A.1.14.7.1); not using plastic bottles, but water dispensers (A.1.14.7.2); having facilities available to deposit used batteries (A.1.14.7.3); making sure that the bags that delegates received have been made from recycled materials as part of a job creation programme (A.1.14.7.4) and lastly to ensure that minimal paper is used during the synod (A.1.14.7.5).

The document states some key points, the most important of which is a call for the reorientation of the church's identity (NGK-AS Agenda, 2015:396). This reorientation needs to happen in three key elements of the church's calling: Its prophetic task (A.17.2.3.1), its task to care for creation (A.17.2.3.2) and its task to witness (A.17.2.3.3). The church will have to re-envision its calling to these three tasks in alignment with the rest of creation as part of God's household. Most noteworthy is the section on care for the environment (A.17.2.3.2) outlining a need for members to engage with environmental issues practically in their daily lives. As part of this many churches have embarked on programmes to assist local congregations in growing an awareness and embracing new lifestyles. The report cites some of these programmes and how the DRC can benefit from taking a similar approach.

The document also notes a wide variety of organisations and institutions it has worked with (A.17.2.2.3) while also noting the importance of the church having a presence in non-religious spaces. The recommendations that was accepted includes once against imploring congregations to engage with these issues (A.17.2.4.1) by using the material made available on the subject (A.17.2.4.1.1), make their prophetic voice heard on environmental concerns (A.17.2.4.1.2) and by engaging in partnerships both outside and within religious spheres (A.17.2.4.1.3). Further assignment was given to the

ecological task team to make new content available to aid congregations (A.17.2.4.2.1) and to create a report on hydraulic fracking, nuclear power and renewable energy (A.17.2.4.2.2). Whilst the financial team of the synod was requested to disinvest in any ecological unfriendly investments (A.17.2.4.3). The church also acknowledged Pope Franciscus' document entitled *Laudato Si'* (A.17.2.4.4)[26], whilst also pledging to host meetings in a simple, efficient and sparing way in sensitivity towards God's household (A.17.2.4.5).

3.4.6. 2019: A new season?

The 17th meeting of the General Synod marks the most comprehensive document by the ecology project team to date. While previous documents outlined the environmental crisis by laying down a foundational framework, 2019's document (NGK-AS Agenda, 2019: 304-311) engages deeper with ecological issues in a relevant manner for congregants. It not only looks at climate change (A.4.4.3.1) and the environmental degradation (A.4.4.3.2) in general but addresses issues key to the South African context like the use of coal as energy source, access to clean drinking water and the socio-economic realities of South Africans (NGK-AS Agenda, 2019: 304-309). The project team one again mentions the importance of partnerships (A.4.4.2.3) and cites documents by the IPCC (A.4.4.3.1) and IPBES (A.4.4.3.2) to scientifically underscore the need for swift action. The document outlines three factors that are key to a more sustainable world: Science and technological solutions, political will and individual action (A.4.4.3.3). The project team then outlines how different levels of church engage with these factors in different ways. The church's highest level of structure (General Synod) is responsible for being a prophetic voice, challenging government policy; while congregants need to adapt more sustainable lifestyles through individual action at home and work (NGK-AS Agenda, 2019:309). These changes are hard and pose some serious challenges to how we live and see the world around us:

> Ons huidige lewenstyl is vir die meeste van ons `'n gerieflike gevangenis waarin ons verstrengel is deur gewoontes, kontrakte, verpligtinge, groter strukture soos ons vervoerstelsel, ensovoorts. Die mikro-strukture van ons lewe is

[26] *Laudato Si'* is a document published by Pope Francis in 2015 and refers to the phrase used by St. Francis of Asissi that reads *Laudato Si', mi' Signore*, meaning: Praise be to you, my Lord.

> ingebed in die makro-strukture. Ons kan ons leefstyl nie sonder groot inspanning herstruktureer of transformeer nie. Ons lewenstyl het oor jare ontwikkel deur die bydraes van talle kundiges en omstandighede, en in ons nuwe omstandighede moet dit weer verander, weereeens [*sic*], met behulp van kundiges (NGK-AS Agenda, 2019:309).

The document concludes that is of vital time to take in a strong ethical standpoint. The team proposes three ways in which this can be done: Prophetic witness – the church needs to speak up and add its voice to the chorus of those demanding change; Priestly action – the church should be involved with different partners in facing environmental challenges together; Kingly role – the church needs to lead by example, converting its assets (churches, halls, etc.) to be ecological sustainable in good governance and management (A.4.4.5.2). Yet, the project team remains realistic, understanding that South Africa' will be locked into a coal dependent economy for the coming years:

> Vir 'n lang tyd nog gaan steenkool-ontginning 'n sleutelrol in die SA ekonomie speel en slegs 'n omvattende aanpak wat alle belangegroepe betrek – regering, industrie, omgewing en plaaslike gemeenskap – sal kan begin om die formidabele uitdagings aan te spreek (NGK-AS Agenda, 2019:310).

The ecology project team is also charged with the task of compiling a report to educate congregations in their calling to promote sustainable lifestyles and communities, on water and water security and plastic (A.4.4.5.3). This report will be delivered at the next General Synod in 2023.

3.5. The need for theological reform

This chapter started by briefly reflected on important themes raised by Reformed South African Theologian Ernst Conradie. The work of Conradie opened up a deeper reflection and discussion on the South African context with specific focus on deep-rooted socio-economic challenges. Understanding these issues with the backdrop of historical injustice and the international economic climate, helps form an integrated understanding of development and the environmental crisis. Situating the DRC within this context gives deeper understanding to the church, it's role in society and helps to create a reference point to evaluate its dialogue and decisions pertaining the environmental crisis. Looking at selected notes and agendas from the General Synod

of the DRC, this chapter gave an overview of engagement with the environmental crisis over the past years.

The decisions made by the DRC over the past decade indicates the denominations intentions to go on a deeper journey concerning environmental issues. The documents and reports submitted to the general assembly bring important themes of interconnectedness, economic injustice, sustainability, stewardship, and many more into focus. These reports helped create a vocabulary within the church to start having meaningful conversations and reflections. The hard work and exceptional quality of these documents highlights how serious those involved take the environmental crisis. Some closing remarks might aid this discussion.

One could make the point that though the quality and intent of these documents cannot be denied, the question of ownership is still left hanging. The way in which the DRC is structured means that the acceptance of a document does not automatically translate into an adoption of it at grassroot level. Time and time again congregations are requested or implored to take these considerations, adopt it and make it their own. The structure is very much focused on every congregation as being its own lawful entity and free to make many decisions independent. Very little of the decisions that are made on General Synod level – pertaining ecology – include a direct call or instruction to local congregations to incorporate or respond. In many cases the information and decisions are made, and congregations are left to decide for themselves how to react appropriately.[27] Though this has led to many success stories and positive examples, one might ask if there are not better ways to keep local congregations accountable in terms of their own ecological journey?

Looking at these agendas one can see that the General Synod has paid an increasing amount of attention to the environmental crisis and ecological issues. Yet, the few pages and little time spent on the topic in reference to the entire meeting is staggeringly little. The most comprehensive report given in 2019 makes up only 10 pages of a 529-page agenda. One could ask how important the environmental crisis truly is to the church? It would seem that in many instances it is seen as just a side

[27] It might be important here to reflect also on the nature of the denominational structure. What can be expected of such a structure and what is its goal? How does the relationship within the DRC's structure and heritage look like between the body of governance and the local congregation?

project and not a core part of the church's concern. This point cannot be overstated. If the church is to become a positive role-player in addressing the environmental crisis, then environmental affairs needs to become part of the identity and DNA of the church.

One could argue that the reports cited in this study underline an important shift that needs to happen; one could even say a reform of some sort. A change is needed in how the church thinks about the world, does worship, talks about creation and salvation, and embodies its responsibility towards the Earth. This change needs to be an integral part of the DRC's fibre. It needs to be embodied and confessed actively in liturgy and witness. It is underlined by ecumenical collaboration and partnerships with all spheres of society. It means a church that does not allocate 10 pages to talking about the environment but rather environment embedded and intrinsically part of every page of every meeting and service.

The enormity and challenge of this change may seem daunting. But Christ calls and energises us with the creative imagination of the upside-down kingdom of God. The DRC has shown intent but this intent needs to be followed by swift and decisive action. This is part of a global shift that needs to happen, not just for the sake of human survival, but for the sake of the flourishing of the whole Earth and cosmos. This is the journey that lays ahead, the question is if the DRC with its history, structure and theological foundation is ready to embrace a revisit (a Reformed understanding) of the Bible, God, creation and our place within it.

3.6. Conclusion

This chapter has tried to build on the reflections of chapter two by shifting the focus of the study to the South African context. By incorporating the themes and approaches discussed in the previous chapter, the study could engage with themes that could be argued are important within the South African context. Surveying different opinions, the study first drew from the work of Conradie, enabling reflections on humanity and its place on Earth. Widening human perspective to incorporate the wider community of creation highlights the impact abuse of human power has on the whole Earth-community. Therefore, having an integrated understanding of environment is of key importance when addressing environmental concerns theologically. Everything is

connected. Understanding that ecology, economy and politics are all part of addressing the environmental crisis should be a crucial part of doing ecotheology.

De Gruchy's Olive Agenda proved a useful and creative metaphor to help drive this point home. By combining the green and brown agenda, one looks at the environmental crisis from a more holistic perspective. Balancing the tension between these two concerns calls for an attentive awareness of the deep underlying (one could argue not that deep at all) manifestation of power and inequality. Documents like the Accra Confession calls for the need to address human suffering in poverty and inequality whilst the rich continue to flourish at the cost of the economically oppressed. The legacy of colonialism still lives in the global economic systems in various different ways. From labelling countries as underdeveloped to using impoverished states as cogs in an international economic machine; these are very real forces and influences that manifest in the real livelihoods of families trying to live and thrive. These systems are fed by the idea of (unlimited) growth and prosperity for all. Yet the Earth does not have enough to go around if every nation is to embody the lifestyles of matured economies and nations.

Yet, the church has a calling to share the good news of the Gospel. Ecotheology must engage with these matting in a responsible and hopeful manner. So too does the DRC. After taking the first half to situate the DRC in its local and global context – both socio-economically and theologically – the study attempted to survey the agendas of its General Synod. This was done to capture the response of the denomination's highest body of governance and leadership. By looking for themes of ecology and environment, this study situated these findings in its particular time and thoughtfully engaged its contributions.

Having reflected on the contributions of the General Synod, the next chapter will further engage important DRC partnerships on their ecotheological journey. By learning from other organisations and projects, the study will highlight some other possible metaphors and images from outside the tradition in the hope of awakening creative and innovate conversation within the DRC.

Chapter 4: In search of possible partners, creative language and deep-rooted spirituality

4.1. Introduction

The previous chapter has taken the time to understand South Africa and its challenges within context of social, economic and environmental issues. All while trying to understand how the church fits into this complex web of relationships. If one is to take the qualities of interconnectedness and interdependence that some feel is so central to ecology and ecotheology (as discussed in chapter three) seriously – one must take great care to understand the DRC and other faith communities of South Africa within its context. The global context, continental and local setting all have an impact on (faith) communities on grassroot level. When looking at an organisation like the DRC it could be tempting to only focus on how the leadership structures and forget to observe it within its time and context.

In the previous chapter, this study has shown that the DRC has engaged and discussed the challenges of environmental degradation and climate change within its highest body of governance. The study has also shown that these engagements have taken great care to engage with the crisis in a nuanced and theological responsible manner. The outcome of these well thought out and discussed engagements does however remain debatable. Whilst these documents mention theological reform, civil engagement, partnerships and new lifestyles, one could ask how this has affected local communities and the actions of individual congregants? Trying to understand the grassroot effects or engagement of these decisions unfortunately falls outside of the scope of this study. This study tries to sketch a more detailed picture of ecotheology within the DRC as a whole and does not have the capacity to look at individual congregations. Examining the ecotheological consciousness within a diverse group of congregations and communities is a complex task that requires more focussed research that this study does not allow for.

The previous chapter has looked at some contributions of Reformed academic voices, whilst incorporating decisions and discussions from the highest level of leadership of the church. The study now turns to possible contributions and reflections that the DRC might be able to learn from in its own ecological reformation. This will be done by firstly

looking at other local church partners and faith communities that have made an active and practical effort to bring the environmental discourse to the homes of people. The examples include the Uniting Reformed Church of South Africa (URCSA), the Green Anglicans and the Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute (SAFCEI). These organisations have been chosen for this study on the basis of their past work done in the field of environmental matters within the religious context, as well their connection through partnerships with the DRC. These organisations could be seen as examples that have positively engage with the environmental crisis in some way or another that can aid the DRC on its journey towards an ecotheological reform.[28]

While doing this helps to compare the DRC's approach with others, some important questions about faith and spirituality remain unanswered. If there is a call to reform, then one might ask how such reform would look like? Attempting to engage with this question, the rest of the chapter will turn its focus to traditions, spiritualities and metaphors that might embody some of the changes that might be helpful in cultivating conversation and engagement on the issue. These are contributions that are not from within the Reformed framework and may in some ways challenge some old theological motives and themes that might have hampered positive engagement with issues on the environment and climate change in the past. These contributions include that of Thomas Berry and Leonardo Boff on the concept of the Cosmic Christ, a closer look at the metaphor of Creation as God's body as described by Sallie McFague, as well as the idea of Dark Green Religion as outlined by Bron Taylor.

These contributions have been chosen on their merit in searching for an adequate spirituality and approach in response to environmental crisis. The authors cited also take care to incorporate a wide variety of religious traditions, theological concepts, creative language and scientific data into their approach. This embodies the core themes of interconnectedness and interdependence found in many ecotheologies. One could argue that for these reasons such sources could add value and help the DRC to think in a fresh manner about God, humanity and the rest of creation. These are by no means an exhaustive list of ecotheological contributions, but these authors

[28] Many others that do exceptional work could be highlighted. For the sake of this study however, an elaboration on more organizations is not possible and warrants an additional survey and discussion.

and ideas might encapsulate something of an ecotheological search for language and spirituality that is more Earth-honouring.

4.2. A brief survey of selected religious organisations in the South African context

Some would argue that faith communities and religious organisations play a significant role in South African society (Forster, 2019). Forster (2019) writes that according to the South African household survey of 2013, 84% of South Africans have indicated that they are Christian. South African faith communities have a proud history of standing up against injustice and oppression, but still have an important role to play in South African society (Conradie *et.al.,* 2001:142). One such a church is the URCSA. In the face of the environmental crisis, the churches of South Africa are faced with a new and uncertain challenge. It is in this time the URCSA have been quick to respond to systems of injustice and environmental issues.

4.2.1. URCSA: The beginnings of an ecotheological response

In an article by the late Mary-Anne Plaatjies-Van Huffel (2013) titled “The search for common understanding with regard to ecology and justice in the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa”, URCSA’s journey with environmental issues are carefully outlined. The article touches on the numerous collaborations and projects the URCSA (and the then Dutch Reformed Mission Church) have been involved in, including partnerships with the WCC, SACC, NECCSA[29] and SAFCEI (Plaatjies-Van Huffel, 2013:1). Plaatjies-Van Huffel (2013:3) continues by focussing on the church’s response to key issues of environmental justice, like access to clean water, GMO’s (2013:4), globalisation (2013:5) and hydraulic fracturing (2013:7). The article makes a point of picking up the connection between ecology and justice, whilst bringing the URCSA’s engagement with these issues into full view. Much of the paper focusses on documenting the presence and involvement of delegates at key conferences and assemblies, showing the denomination’s intent to be forerunners in engagement with environmental issues in South Africa since the early 90’s.

[29] Network of Earth keeping Christian Communities in South Africa.

Though there seems to be many similarities between URCSA and the DRC's response to environmental matters, there are also key differences. Whilst both seem engaged on these matters on synodical level and through collaborations, the URCSA frequently engages environmental issues on a much more grassroot level; really focussing on bringing the conversation to the public sphere. A central example of this is the denomination's engagement with the Accra confession and subsequent partnership addressing globalisation.

In 2005 the URCSA General Synod accepted the Accra confession, but also committed themselves to "embark hence on into a process of confessing in the midst of economic injustice and degradation of the earth" (Plaatjies-Van Huffel, 2013:5). It is this commitment that lead to a process spearheaded by Allan Boesak to deeper theologically engage the Accra confession, but also to enter into dialogue with the global north on these issues (Plaatjies-Van Huffel, 2013:5). The outcome was a collaboration between the Evangelical Reformed Church in Germany (ERCG) and the URCSA that was dubbed the Globalisation Project. Further developments of this project can also be found in volumes like *Globalisation – The politics of empire, justice and the life of faith* (2009) and *Globalisation II – Global Crisis, Global Challenge, Global Faith* (2010). The culmination of this partnership was the creation of a booklet titled *Dreaming a Different World: Globalisation and Justice for Humanity and the Earth – The Challenge of the Accra Confession for the Churches* (Boesak *et.al.*, 2010) and a joint declaration titled "Dreaming a Different World Together" (2010).

One could argue the importance of this partnership in a few ways. For the purpose of this study what is remarkable about this example, is the commitment of URCSA to engage in dialogue on these issues and hereby bringing the discussion into the public sphere. This does not just happen through conversations and projects of representatives but by the attempt to bring ecological awareness into the homes of communities. The fruit of this endeavour was practical recourses that could be used by ministers and congregants: booklets with liturgical and sermon outlines based on segments of the Accra confession, the translation of the Accra confession into four additional languages, a designation of two Sundays for preaching on ecology and justice, a sermon booklet to help ministers preach on ecology and economy and further useful material including the development of 50 sermons on these issues by URCSA

and ERCG (Plaatjies-Van Huffel, 2017:7). One seems to find a specific intent to engage with the issue on congregational level.

One could ask questions about the reason for this response or what the impact of this project has been in the long run? Has this changed the denominations future engagement on the topic; is it still a priority today or has environmental matters faded into the background? These are not questions we aim to answer here. The importance for this study lies in the manner URSCA responded to the call of the Accra confession to confess environmental and economic injustice. One might argue that there is a deeper focus on the economic side of the conversation (and that might even be true) but the practical way in which the URCSA reacted and integrated the Accra confession – and subsequent partnership with the ERCG – might be a positive example that highlights what is sometimes missing in responses from the DRC and other denominations (when it comes to environmental matters). One could wonder what the impact of a framework document like "Ter Wille van Die Aarde en Haar Bewoners" could have been if a campaign of similar sorts was launched within the whole denomination.

4.2.2. The Green Anglicans: Educating and equipping

The Environmental Network of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa (also known as the Green Anglicans or ACSAEN) aims to support congregations and communities in God's call to be Earth keepers and care for creation (Green Anglicans, 2020a). Their origin is summarised on the Green Anglicans website[30]:

> The Environmental Network of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa was founded in 2004 with Bishop Geoff Davies as chair. Two Diocesan networks were formed JAEI (Johannesburg Anglican Environmental Initiative and the Natal Environmental Network. The Diocesan Environmental Group (DEG) was formed in Cape Town Diocese in 2011. In 2012 a Provincial Coordinator, Rev Rachel Mash was appointed and a youth Coordinator Ncumisa Magadla. The Network became a movement under the name of "Green Anglicans" and has

[30] http://www.greenanglicans.org/about-us/.

> now spread to Central Africa (Malawi, Zambia, Botswana, Zimababwe [*sic*]), Kenya, DRC and Portugal (Green Anglicans, 2020a).

Though the Green Anglicans is a local initiative, the Anglican church's environmental journey can be traced further back. The call to safeguard creation is one of the five points of mission published by the Anglican Consultative Council and accepted as part of the Anglican Communion (Zink, 2017:144). These five marks of mission read:

> The mission of the Church is the mission of Christ. 1) To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom. 2) To teach, baptise and nurture new believers. 3) To respond to human need by loving service. 4) To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation. 5) To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth (Anglican Consultative Council, 2020).[31]

Being an integral part of how the church sees its mission elevates the environmental concerns to the very top of the church's priorities. Caring for the Earth is not just seen as a separate part or inferior concern, but a key focus of the church's work and life. However, this does not automatically translate into an instant consciousness or awareness of the environment in congregants' daily lives. That's why a movement like the Green Anglicans are so important because it is anchored in praxis. The fifth mark of mission has become the movement's vision that feeds their task to: 1) Aid and inspire Anglicans in the spirituality of caring for creation; 2) inspire and encourage people to live sustainable lives; 3) inspire and equip churches and dioceses to take practical action; and to 4) create a network of individuals, churches and regions to prophetically act in advocacy (Green Anglicans, 2020a). All of this whilst embodying values of spiritual formation, youth empowerment and bringing hope (Green Anglicans, 2020a).

Through partnership with SAFCEI (discussed below) and A Rocha[32] the network has collaborated in many different projects, whilst focussing throughout on educating and equipping both leaders and community members. As part of this focus Green Anglicans have created a library of recourses for churches and members to use. The materials range from sermon focussed collections, to catechism material, prayers

[31] http://acen.anglicancommunion.org.
[32] https://www.arocha.org/en/a-rocha-south-africa/.

and themed centred materials dealing with important dates op the environmental calendar (Green Anglicans, 2020b). All these recourses are openly accessible to anyone irrespective of their denomination in different languages on their website.[33]

The manner in which the the Anglican Church of South Africa takes a hands-on approach in educating faith leaders and community members is an inspiring example of hope. Though no response is perfect, it shows the importance of creation as part of God's story. Their focus on youth and lay leadership is an important focus in educating leaders for the future – a cause highlighted by authors like De Gruchy (2015:3). The practical nature of the network's work helps bring home that the environmental crisis is truly an issue that has an impact on all of human and non-human life on Earth.

4.2.3. SAFCEI: Inter-faith public witness

The Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute (SAFCEI) is a multi-faith organisation that was launched in 2005. Through an ethos of partnership SAFCEI focusses on collaboration, networking, training, research and action in cooperation with a multitude of different faiths and organisations (SAFCEI, 2020). Their website reads:

> SAFCEI (Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute) is a multi-faith organisation committed to supporting faith leaders and their communities in Southern Africa to increase awareness, understanding and action on eco-justice, sustainable living and climate change. […] We emphasise the spiritual and moral imperative to care for the Earth and the community of all life. We call for ethical leadership from all in power and speak out on issues of eco-justice, encouraging citizen action (SAFCEI, 2020).

SAFCEI engages with environmental issues through raising awareness, promoting environmental responsibility and action, facilitating and support of environmental advocacy, confronting injustice, advancing ecological and socio-economical justice, whilst also influencing and formulating environmental policies and ethical guidelines (SAFCEI, 2020). These outcomes are pursued by "Acting to replenish living Earth in

[33] http://www.greenanglicans.org/resources/

a way that is balanced and informed by prayer, contemplation, and meditation. […] Working to build community among and between the Earth community and the Divine. […] Striving to empower and encourage people of faith to act and become agents of change" (SAFCEI, 2020).

SAFCEI have a multi-pronged approach to addressing environmental issues. One of these include playing an important role advocating more environmentally sustainable practices. This has in the past involved successfully blocking the South African government's nuclear deal with Russia, USA and Korea as unconstitutional and unlawful (SABI, 2017:32), whilst continuing to question the government's continued investment in nuclear and coal powered power plants (De Gasparis, 2020). Other actions include taking on well-known companies like Famous Brands (owners of Wimpy) and McDonalds to have poultry be "cage-free" by 2025 (Reynolds, 2020). These initiatives whilst also organising marches, protests and campaigns all form part of SAFCEI's approach to raise awareness and give agency to causes confronting human and environmental injustice. This is further amplified by their Active Citizens' Network (ACN). The ACN is a group of volunteers "who come together to support SAFCEI's campaigns and create social change within their own communities" (SAFCEI, 2020).

Another aspect of SAFCEI's approach has to do with grassroot activities through engagement with local religious organisations and communities. SAFCEI's website[34] is full of recourses that not only educate on issues of energy-, food- and climate justice, but also connects people with networks, people and organisations. One could argue that this fact makes SAFCEI a good case study as an organisation that challenges leadership on all levels of societies (including the government and local authorities), whilst being well-rooted in the reality of every day South Africans.

4.2.4. Some concluding remarks on the DRC's Projects and partnerships

It is noteworthy that the DRC has in some way or another been involved with the above-mentioned organisations. The DRC General Synod is a member of SAFCEI

[34] https://safcei.org/resources/.

(NGK-AS, 2011:211)[35] with the current head of the Public Witness ministry of the Western Cape Synod (Braam Hanekom) sitting as a member of SAFCEI's board. At the 2019 General Synod SAFCEI and also the Anglican church is mentioned as important partners in addressing environmental issues (NGK-AS, 2019:304).[36] The relationship with URCSA has also been an important priority for the church, with the two churches in ongoing conversation on ways to reunify and collaborate.

Though one might not always find the DRC on the frontline or in the limelight when it comes to environmental issues, the church has been very visible on the matter of hydraulic fracking and drought crisis in recent years though these partnerships. It is easier to map these partnerships than it is to evaluate the impact it might have had on the wider church community. The above-mentioned organisations (and numerous others that this study have not mentioned) all have partaken in initiatives that have attempted to bridge the gap between organisational leadership and those on grassroot level. They are valuable examples of attempts to engage with communities to enliven change from the ground up. Though the DRC has the potential to do this, one could argue that it has much to learn. Yet, it is also important to note that there are projects that have attempted to do just this on various regional levels different synods.

Thus far this chapter has outlined a selection of organisations that have attempted to engage with the environmental crisis on different levels with a practical vision at heart. Though these responses are not always perfect, one might feel that these organisations have engaged environmental issues in a much more holistic and practical way than the general leadership of the DRC. These and other organisations are vital partners in the continued effort to energise and activate local communities toward more sustainable lifestyles and habits. Having a creative and practical vision is however just one part of addressing the environmental crisis through the structure of the DRC. If true change is to happen – an ecological or environmental reform in the truest sense – then attention needs to be given to the embodied faith and spirituality of the church. A new (or different) vocabulary is needed to engage with the issues in a creative and innovative way. Therefore, the chapter will now switch gears and turn

[35] Agenda point A11.7.2.2. of the DRC General Synod 2011.
[36] Agenda point A4.4.2.3 of the DRC General Synod 2019.

its attention toward some metaphors and themes that might stimulate a renewed discussion and excitement around environmental issues within the church.

4.3. A search for (new?) language and embodied spirituality

Some key themes that this study has tried to address thus far have centred around the way in which humans position themselves within three key relationships of God, humanity and creation. These relationships have been an underlying theme in not just this study, but many others in an attempt to make sense of our reality. This section would want to further reflect on images and metaphors that might aid in further stimulating thoughts on this topic. These ideas are not new *per se* – some of these ideas have been around for many years – but it seems that there is a lot to be learned from other's reflections on human nature and God. The following list is only a small selection of ecotheologies that encompass something of the values interconnectedness and interdependence that make up core elements of ecotheology. The hope is that these thoughts and reflections may challenge people to see the world and creation differently. When our minds are transformed and renewed, so are our actions (Luke 6:43-45). To truly and deeply reform our lifestyles we need to think differently about our place in the world.

4.3.1. Ideas on the cosmic Christ and salvation

As noted earlier in chapter three, Conradie (2011a:2) names salvation – that focusses on human well-being alone – as one of the crucial areas that needs to be addressed. This goes along with another point that Conradie (2011a:2) raises which is an escapist view of human destiny. Reflections on salvation of humanity is crucial to the church's response to the environmental crisis. Ecotheology tries to counteract popular Christian rhetoric and language that speak of being strangers on Earth, with an emphasis on interconnectedness and dependence. Chapter two touches on some of these themes and theologies. Some might argue the Christian faith has been to human centred and anthropocentric by nature. This could lead to questions like where humanity fits in the wider scope of creation? What could the reality of the risen Christ mean for rest of creation? How do we understand God's narrative with the Earth in terms of the vastness of the cosmos? Gottfried (1995:2) writes that we don't have to look outside

the Christian tradition for answers like these. Within the Christian faith there is a rich legacy at our disposal (Gottfried, 1995:2).

4.3.1.1. The new story

It's almost impossible to imagine the vastness of the cosmos and the extent of God's good creation. The universe extends far beyond human comprehension and understanding. When contemplating this, one could feel small or even insignificant in the scope of God's creative work. One author (among many) that has reflected on the story of this cosmos is the late Catholic historian of world religions, Thomas Berry. His book *The Christian Future and the Fate of Earth* (2009) is a chronological collection of a selection of his works and encapsulates something of how Berry sees God's narrative played out across the universe. Berry often focused on the indigenous religions of the world, trying to uncover wisdoms from within their sacred beliefs and traditions. This has led to a deep and embodied spirituality that finds profound connection with all created things. One theme that can be found throughout in this volume of work is Berry's engagement with science and evolution. Berry tries to use these ideas to situate humanity within the context of a great cosmic story that has played out since the start of the universe.

Berry (2009:26) believed that we are in need of a new Christian cosmology. He argues that to understand Earth and our true relationship with it, "we need to know the great story of Earth and of the universe that brought it and ourselves into being" (Berry, 2009:27). According to this thought the key is to reimagine (or redefine) the human position within this cosmic narrative (Berry, 2009:30). Berry writes:

> [...] the human is by definition that being in whom the universe reflects on and celebrates itself in conscious self-awareness. The human is a mode of being of the universe entire as well as a distinctive being in it. More than any other being the human is intimate with the universe in the full range of its extension in time and space (Berry, 2009:30).

It is exactly this connection Berry believes humanity has with cosmos – as a reflection of the universe, yet still distinctive and individual – he uses in reflecting on the incarnation and human nature of Christ. Therefore, as he writes elsewhere one could see Christ's incarnation in a cosmological context (Berry, 2009:55). By referring to the

epistle of Colossians (and Ephesians) and the preface of the Gospel of John, Berry (2009:56) argues that these writers did not see Christ simply as an individual and therefore that the Christ event had a cosmic dimension. It is through this perspective that the incarnation of Christ as human does not just mean salvation for humans but has cosmic consequences. Christ is therefore part of a cosmic narrative Berry (2009:32) calls the New Story. In this New Story, Christ not only reveals himself in this narrative but enters into its reality, becomes part of its history and reconciles with creation through his incarnation as human (Berry, 2009:32-33).

In a similar vein, South American liberation theologian and philosopher Leonardo Boff (1997) also writes of the cosmos and this cosmic narrative in his book *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*. According to Boff (1997:146) the cosmos is in an open evolutionary process but does not identify God with the cosmic process itself, but rather as revealed within it (1997:147). He continues by arguing that creation is not something mechanical but rather likens it to a world organism that is open to everything around it (Boff, 1997:149). Boff (1997:149) cites Berry and others who call this open process differentiation, autopoiesis and communion – but prefers to rather talk about complexity, interiority and connectedness. For Boff (1997:185) the ultimate foundation of cosmic Christology is found "at the heart of the inner life of the Trinity". He argues that the incarnation of Christ was not due to human sin because that would be to anthropocentric and make sin to central – the Son would be incarnated regardless of sin (Boff, 1997:185). He writes:

> Sin has not destroyed the original plan of the trinity but rather has given it the unique way it comes into being, in the form of the Suffering Servant and the Crucified One who share in the passion of the world (Boff, 1997:185).[38]

4.3.1.2. Teilhard de Chardin and process theology

At this point it might be important to note especially Berry draws a lot on the work of French philosopher and Jesuit Catholic priest Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (Tucker & Grim, 2017:404). Tucker and Grim (2017:394) write that these two figures (Berry and Teilhard) "grappled with the critical question of the significance of traditional religions

[38] This echoes some ideas and themes found in Irenaeus' work as discussed in chapter two of this study.

and their cosmologies in light of the scientific story of an evolving universe". These theologians are also associated with a stream of theology called process theology or process thinking (Conradie, 2008:30) which believes that everything is in constant process, ever-changing and evolving (Cobb & Griffin, 1976:14).[39] Teilhard focussed heavily on the cosmic dimensions of Christ, affirming that Christ is the central point of the whole visible and invisible universe (Santmire, 1985:163). For Teilhard all things have their being and becoming through the universal Christ, meaning that God is not (just) the first mover in the story of the universe, but rather the ever-present final cause (Santmire, 1985:163). There are however those who are uneasy with the work of Berry, Teilhard and other theologians who use a similar approach (Conradie, 2008:31). Santmire (1985:169) for example feels that Teilhard's theology overemphasises the spiritual motif and is dominated by the metaphor of accent, falling short of its original promise (Santmire, 1985:170). In an article called "The Earth in God's Economy: Reflections on the Narrative of God's Work", Conradie (2008) also questions the way in which an ecological moral is derived from the story of the universe (Conradie, 2008:31). He further warns that this type of approach might emphasise human belonging on earth too much and cites Sittler by saying that every doctrine of redemption must exist within a doctrine of creation (Conradie, 2008:32).

4.3.1.3. The relevance of the cosmic Christ

Grappling with the nature of Christ and what the Christ event means for all of creation are central concerns when reflecting on the cosmic dimensions of Christ. The questions these theologies ask, often raise complex reflections on the nature of Christ, humanity and the rest of creation. Thus far this chapter looked at contributions focussing on the reality and meaning of the Christ event, situating it within the context of the entire cosmos. With this broadening of horizons, one might find a great cosmic narrative or New Story. Within this story Christ reveals himself as a humble human and suffering servant, becoming part of both human history and the story of the cosmos.

[39] Process theology is a development of Alfred North Whitehead's process philosophy (Cobb & Griffin, 1976:13). Cobb and Griffin define process though as follows: "Process thought by definition affirms that process is fundamental. It does not assert that everything is in process; for that would mean that even the fact that things are in process is subject to change. There are unchanging principles of process and abstract forms. But to be actual is to be a process. Anything which is not a process is an abstraction from process, not a full-fledged actuality" (Cobb & Griffin, 1976:14).

Delving into these reflections might feel overwhelming to some and even confusing to others. They challenge our thoughts on God's involvement and presence in our daily lives; whilst also awakening reflections on the nature of Christ's being and the role of the cosmos in God's story. Taking more time to delve deeper into these contributions might aid the DRC in opening up a meaningful reflection and conversation on the nature of God and humans in relation the vastness of the entire creation. These are challenging reflection and might have deep implications on how we see the world and act here on Earth. Seeing ourselves as not just part of an Earth community but rather in some ways part of a bigger narrative that reminds us of our fragility, yet also adds a new scale to God's love and compassion.

4.3.2. The Earth as body of God

The previous section focused on cosmic reflections on the nature of God and Christ. This section builds on this narrative and how it affects our life and being in our immediate environment and living habitat – the Earth. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, new language, metaphors and images might help the church to address the environmental crisis from a Christian perspective in a new light. When it comes to the use of creative language and metaphor, the late North American feminist theologian Sallie McFague has made numerous contributions. Most notably through her reimagining of a Christian cosmology by offering the metaphor (and model) of the world/universe as body of God.

In her book *A New Climate for Theology*, McFague (2008) discusses different models and metaphors that has tried to capture God's character and essence. In the chapter titled 'Who is God? Creation and Providence', McFague (2008:66-67) briefly describes the deistic model[40], the dialogic Model (2008:67-68)[41], the monarchical model (2008:69-70)[42] and the agential model (2008:70-72).[43] These models try to summarise some of the main and prominent images that have been used to describe God and our interaction with God-self. At this point McFague makes an important statement

[40] Where God is compared to a clockmaker. God creates the clock (creation), winds it up and steps back (McFague, 2008:67).
[41] Focus on individual, humans meet God in experience and not in the world (McFague, 2008:68).
[42] A model where the king controls its subjects and is built on trust and obedience (McFague, 2008:69).
[43] God is involved in the world and oversees it in every way (McFague, 2008:70).

that warns against a generalist or absolutist views by arguing that there is no such thing as a perfect model describing God or the world, writing:

> […] we need to remember that all models of God and the world are limited, partial and imperfect. We are trying to get at the *most basic* expression of that relationship, realizing that there is no one right model, that many are needed, and that all have problems (McFague, 2008:71).

In an effort to provide a model that is appropriate for our time [*sic*], McFague offers the contribution of the world as God's body (McFague, 2008:73). The model (henceforth referred to as metaphor) of the world as body of God was discussed in detail in her book titled *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (1993). For the author there is three distinct implications for this model: 1) That humans must know and understand their place in the world; 2) the acknowledgement of God as the source of life and 3) the realisation that God and humans are both in charge of the world (McFague, 2008:74). McFague argues that this metaphor offers an alternative to more traditional thinking. She roots human existence within God itself, giving a deeper meaning to the way in which humans act, live and view their existence. For McFague (2008:79) this means that humans are indeed at home on Earth and therefore acts as an alternative to a heavy emphasis on salvation.

4.3.2.1. Embodiment

This metaphor opens up conversation and that is exactly what it is supposed to do (McFague, 2008:107-110). Metaphorical language like this stimulates reaction and interaction without being to direct. Greyvenstein (2018:59) notes how McFague sees all language as metaphorical; when you use metaphors, the reception can be ambiguous, and the reader derives their own meaning from it. Greyvenstein frames McFague's work in her personal efforts to address the environmental crisis:

> Sally [*sic*] McFague's model of the Universe as God's body is deeply affected by her commitment to a natural world in crisis and the seeming disregard of humanity to this problem. [...] The practical and ethical response to a planet in peril establishes the driving force behind McFague's theology (Greyvenstein, 2018:59).

It is this global crisis and personal determination that has driven McFague to respond in a practical and timely manner. In her work she argues that humanity needs to change its worldview and understanding of where it fits into the bigger picture (Van Schalkwyk, 2008:207). It is this change of heart and perspective that influences everything we do and how we live as human beings on a macro and micro level (Van Schalkwyk, 2008:207). Another important part of this approach – and central to this metaphor of universe as God's body – is the idea of bodylines. Greyvenstein (2018:55) writes that an inability to love our own human bodylines has led to destruction and indifference toward the rest of creation. McFague (2008:115) places focus on God's love, and how God's transcendence has implications for our interactions with everything around us:

> The intimation of transcendence at the heart of Christian faith is the awakening to the body of the world. Loving God means feeding the suffering body of the world. […] It is lowly and basic, having to do *first of all* with physical needs (food, water, housing) and physical pain (suffering, deterioration, destruction. Living within the model of the world as God's body means focusing on these material, bodily matters (McFague, 2008:115-116).

In an article titled "The Cosmos as the Body of God: The Interpretation of the Christian Story in Sallie Mcfague's Oeuvre", South African ecofeminist and Associate Professor UNISA, Annalet van Schalkwyk (2008) reflects on some of the main themes in McFague's work. Van Schalkwyk writes that the re-interpretation and re-imagining of the traditional Christian story is one of three central narratives in McFague's work (Van Schalkwyk, 2008:205). Part of this re-imaging has a lot to do with our embodiment of the Christian story. Drawing comparisons to Berry, she writes:

> This 're-embodiment' of the Christian story in the context of a new understanding of our universe tells us a new story about ourselves: That we are bodies, made of the same stuff as all other life-forms on our planet; that we are bodies among the bodies of other life-forms on earth, and that, all together, we form one body, the body of the Earth (Van Schalkwyk, 2008:205).

Internalising the Christian story and embodying it in this way might help humans overcome dualisms and hierarchies in a very human centred Christian tradition (Van Schalkwyk, 2008:207). She continues:

> The organic world view and the new creation story brings it to our attention indisputably that we *are* bodies, made of the same stuff as all other life-forms on our planet; that we are bodies *among* the bodies of other life-forms on earth, and that, all together, we form one body, the body of the Earth – which is again but one of the bodies in the greater universe (Van Schalkwyk, 2008:208).

4.3.2.2. Pantheism vs. Panentheism

Though one could argue that this metaphor could hold an important perspective that can aid humanity in seeking a different life and worldview, it has not come without its criticism. For one, there is a bigger emphasis on the Earth as human's home, which Conradie (as mentioned earlier) does not believe is the case yet (Conradie, 2005:63). Some like Frost (2006:154-155) feel that the model and metaphor lean a bit too much towards reductionism[44] and pantheism. While others like Mevorach (2017:323) rather associate her work with panentheism. The differences between pantheism and panentheism has been a discussed by many authors and ecotheological contributions like Moltmann (1993), Boff (1997), Deane-Drummond (2008), Taylor (2010), Rasmussen (1996 & 2013) to name a few. The distinction is an important one because it defends many ecotheologies from being accused of worshiping nature itself rather than God. Boff (1997:153) gives an outline of the difference between the two:

> Modern theology has coined another expression: *panentheism* (Greek: *pan*=all; *en*=in; *theós*=God); that is, God in all and all in God. […] Panentheism must be clearly distinguished from pantheism (Greek: *pan*=all; *theós*=God) claims that all is God and God is all. It holds that God and the world are identical; that the world is not God's creature, but the necessary mode of God's existing. Pantheism does not accept any difference. Everything is identical; all is God (Boff, 1997:153).

4.3.2.3. The relevance of this model and metaphorical language

Though Frost (2006:156) shared his concerns over the theology behind the metaphor, he feels that it is a necessary recourse for Christian ecological theology and is relevant to the South African context – especially in its criticism towards consumerism. Van

[44] "A procedure or theory that reduces complex data and phenomena to simple terms" (Merriam-Webster, 2020).

Schalkwyk (2008:218) also alludes to this underlining South Africa's place in the global economy as well as the influence of globalism, capitalism and inequality on the local context. McFague gives a language that helps communities reconnect and understand the sacredness of their environment. The model of the world as God's body uses metaphorical language to convey a God that is present and deeply involved in the world. This does not mean worshiping nature but rather realising that all created things are dependent on God for life and seeing God in our lived reality. This paradigm shift is necessary if human behaviour is to change toward ecology (Van Schalkwyk, 2008:218).

4.3.3. Dark Green Religion

Thus far we have discussed the idea of reframing our worldview within a cosmic perspective by examining the work of Berry, Boff and Teilhard de Chardin amongst others on the cosmic perspectives on God and Christ. Situating humanity within the great cosmic story of God might help in changing perspective and habits of humanity possibly leading to a deeper reflection on God's love and Grace. These brief reflections were followed by the creative use of metaphor and language in McFague's model of the world as body of God. This image might help humanity realise its dependence on God but also might have a profound impact on how we reflect on our actions and the impact it has. For McFague this leads to a sacramental life where nature itself is not worshiped as God, but God reveals itself and can be experienced through nature.

These metaphors and images have the potential to awaken further reflection and discussion in the South African context but also within the DRC itself. Within the Christian community the focus does not however just fall on our worldviews or action, but on our embodied spirituality and faith. One might ask how a spirituality could look that can bring deep and embodied change to believers? What lies at the core of what is needed for believes to see the world differently and adapt an alternative lifestyle?

One such an example might be found in dark green religion. In his book *Dark Green Religion: Nature Spirituality and the Planetary Future*, Bron Taylor (2010) takes care in introducing and unpacking the term. Taylor is Professor or Religion and Nature at the University of Florida with his work mainly focussing on the "emotional, spiritual, ethical and political dimensions of environmental movements" (University of Florida,

2020). Some of his earlier works[45] have focussed on radical environmentalism, a fact one also sees while reading *Dark Green Religion*.

Of all the examples mentioned in this section one could perhaps argue that Taylor could challenge conventional though on religion and spirituality the most. His thoughts might be confronting to those with a very institutional view of religion. At the offset Taylor (2010:2) calls for a rethink of how we define terms like religion and spirituality. He does this by deploying a more flexible definition of religion (Taylor, 2010:223). He defines dark green religion as follows:

> A great deal of this religious creativity has been dark green, flowing from a deep sense of belonging to and connectedness in nature, while perceiving the earth and its living systems to be sacred and interconnected. Dark green religion is generally deep ecological, biocentric, or ecocentric, considering all species to be intrinsically valuable, that is, valuable apart from their usefulness to human beings (Taylor, 2010:13).

Taylor (2010:13) outlines that this is generally based on a kinship with the rest of life (a part of life that has evolved from a common ancestor), accompanied by a feeling of humility and critique of human superiority, and bolstered by metaphysics of interconnection and interdependence. He continues to outline four different types of dark green religion divided under two main streams of Animism[46] and Gaian Earth Religion (Taylor, 2010:14). Thus, dark green religion can be divided Spiritual Animism, Naturalistic Animism, Gaian Spirituality and Gaian Naturalism (Taylor, 2010:15). After using the first two chapters to introduce, define and explain these themes, Taylor moves on to highlight examples of dark green religion. He does this by looking the context of Northern America and around the world in secular society, finding it in expressions of different media, cultures and groups of people. Taylor (2010:200) ends the book by noting the impact evolution theory and dark green religion has made in such a short while, whilst also highlighting that social change does not usually happen quickly but it can if triggered by grave threat (2010:201). He concludes by identifying

[45] Most notably *Ecological Resistance Movements: The Global Emergence of Radical and Popular Environmentalism* (1995)
[46] Def

potential pitfalls and promise that dark green religion might bring to the table in a search for what he calls a sensible post-Darwinian religion (Taylor, 2010:222).

Taylor leaves much food for thought that can't be unpacked here. Some key theological themes that could be valuable to briefly focus on might be the Gaia hypothesis, distinctions between dark green religion and deep ecology, whilst also taking a look at the power of social epidemics.

4.3.3.1. Gaia hypothesis

Gaia originally refers to the Greek goddess of the Earth also known a *Ge* (Lovelock, 2000:10). James Lovelock is widely cited as the person who has incorporated the idea of the Greek goddess into what is called the Gaia-hypostasis[47] in his book *Gaia: A new look at life on Earth* (2000).[48] Park (2017:334) defines the Gaia-hypothesis (henceforth referred to as Gaian theory) as an understanding of Earth as a gigantic body of life or organism where all forms of life are connected with one another. There are different opinions on whether this way of looking at Earth sees it as a living and conscious being, or if the image of Gaia is only metaphorical. Taylor (2010:36) emphasises that in his understanding of Lovelock it is strictly a metaphor, calling this kind of thought Gaian Naturalism. Conradie (2006:134) writes that although he understands the Gaian theory as a broad scientific hypothesis, it was soon transformed into a spirituality of the Earth referring to Earth as a as a "living, sacred and almost divine entity". Taylor (2010:16) associates this kind of thought with Animism and calls it Gaian Spirituality.

This study is not so much interested in dwelling on different interpretations of the Gaia-hypothesis but rather to highlight some key elements of Gaian theory that may be helpful in fostering a more Earth-honouring faith. One such element can be found in the work of Irish systematic theologian Anne Primavesi (2000). In her book *Sacred Gaia: Holistic theology and earth system science,* she develops the religious implications of the theory. Eaton (2012:208) writes that Primavesi's work addresses the problem of hierarchical thinking by reinforcing the Gaian awareness of profound interconnectedness among all living entities. He continues to write that through the

[47]Also referred to as Gaian theory.
[48]First published in 1979.

rich image of “Sacred Gaia”, Primavesi stresses the connection, diversity and sacredness of all beings as forms within an interconnected whole (Eaton, 2012:208). As mentioned earlier (chapter two) interconnectedness is an important part of most ecotheologies; what Gaian theory underscores is the awareness of being a small part of a whole system. Moltmann (1985:300) writes that one could even enlarge the scope of this though to extend towards other planets or even (as Taylor writes) the entire cosmos (Taylor, 2010:16). In a similar vein, Rasmussen (1996:18) connects this cosmic perspective of Gaia, while reflecting on a speech of former Czech president Vaclav Havel:

> Together the cosmological principle and the Gaia hypothesis tap forgotten awareness encoded in all religions and most philosophies and cultures, an awareness perhaps even inscribed in the unconscious of all of us, resident there in the form of primordial archetypes (Rasmussen, 1996:18).

Gaian theory forms an important part of what Taylor tries to describe as dark green religion. The themes of interconnectedness, interdependence and deep rootedness in a bigger system are key elements of dark green religion. They are however also an important part of the wider environmental movement and ecotheology. What then sets dark green religion apart from other ecological movements like deep ecology?

4.3.3.2. Dark Green Religion vs. Deep Ecology

Deane-Drummond (2008:35) writes that deep ecology “represents a collection of writers who emphasises different aspects of its broad holistic approach to the natural world”. The term is widely associated with the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess who coined the term (Conradie, 2011a:77). Naess used the terms of “shallow” and “deep” ecology to criticise environmental approaches that focus on awareness of pollution and environmental degradation stating that this was only occupied with human action (Deane-Drummond, 2008:35). Deep ecology however shifts perspective completely to a wider biotic community (Deane-Drummond, 2008:35). Chryssavgis writes: “Contemporary deep ecology emphasizes the fact that the correct perspective and relationship between humanity and Creation has been distorted, almost destroyed” (Chryssavgis, 2017:279).

The reception of deep ecology has been varied. In her article “Sacredness and Sustainability: Searching for a Practical Eco-Spirituality”, Annalet van Schalkwyk (2011) calls deep ecology one of the most important streams in the wider ecological movement, writing: “Here the human spirit is understood as the mode of consciousness in which the individual feels a deep sense of belonging, of connectedness, to the earth and the cosmos as a whole” (Van Schalkwyk, 2011:83). She also adds that this awareness is spiritual at its core and connects a sense of belonging with practical choices and actions (Van Schalkwyk, 2011:83). Conradie (2011a:77) writes that deep ecology sees everything in the universe as one and every part of the whole equally valuable. This however poses its own challenges when it comes to competing interests (Conradie, 2011a:78). Many also feel that the movement is to abstract and raises serious questions about the plight and suffering of the poor (Deane-Drummond, 2008:37).

One could ask if in his book Taylor could not lay out a more clear distinction between dark green religion and deep ecology? Taylor (2010:8) often engages Naess and when reflecting on the impact of his work on Baruch Spinoza he writes of the value of deep ecology’s contribution. Yet, he follows this statement by saying that deep ecology is not equivalent to dark green religion though they have many similarities. One might make the argument that Taylor draws on these elements of equality, universal value and interdependency to share a vision in dark green religion that is much more relatable and less abstract to a wider variety of people. Taylor also engages with a good share of environmental activism – with which deep ecology has also been linked in the past according to Deane-Drummond (2008:37) – yet speaks of dark green religion as a much wider movement that spread across the Earth in the everyday lives of every person.

At the end of *Dark Green Religion,* Taylor (2010:223) writes that he chose to use dark green religion rather than paganism, deep ecology or natural religion because although some proponents of dark green religion might see the Earth as literally divine, not all do. For Taylor (2010:224) the use of deep ecology is to synonymous with Naess and politics of radical environmentalism. He also continues by saying writing that “some proponents of deep ecology reject the idea that it has anything to do with religion. I felt these facts would constrain the broader field of view I wanted to provide” (Taylor, 2010:224). Therefore: Though dark green religion and deep ecology share a

lot; they are not synonymous. One could argue that dark green religion seems much wider and more accessible.

4.3.3.3. Dark Green Religion as a social epidemic

A point that Tayor raises in his concluding chapter of *Dark Green religion* is the need for dark green religion to become a sweeping global movement, or as Taylor calls it an epidemic. Citing the work of Malcom Gladwell, Taylor (2010:207-209) outlines three points that are important if such a movement is to gain traction: 1) Individuals make a huge difference; 2) communicating ideas that people easily remember and 3) establishing an optimistic and positive (even hopeful) environment. An important part of making a movement like this stick are people on ground level that buy into and perpetuate the movement. Taylor (2010:209) highlights two important types of people for that helps a social epidemic reaches a tipping point: Educators as Mavens. Taylor (2010:209) believes that we need people to put in the hard work in creating a body of work that informs the movement and especially highlights the role of environmental studies scholars.

The concept of dark green religion opens up a more loosely defined idea of religion, which comes with its own dangers and pitfalls. Looking towards all parts of society, religions and cultures helps Taylor create a mosaic of deep-rooted traditions and practices that create the pattern of dark green religion. This pattern embodies something of a deeper connectedness with creation whilst awakening a spirituality that goes further than an anthropocentric faith. One could only wonder what impact a search for a darker green religion and spirituality could have on a denomination like the DRC?

4.3.4. Concluding remarks and a question on indigenous religions

This section of chapter four dove deeper into some images, language and theologies that try to react to the environmental crisis from within a deep and rooted Earth-honouring spirituality. These contributions challenge many perceptions and worldviews that have been an important part of the Christian traditions for the longest time. Some final reflections on the contributions might help solidify these theologies as well as their potential and relevance to the South African and DRC context.

Firstly, the above-mentioned contributions all heavily rely on scientific data and findings to ground their theories and theologies in an imperial manner. There is an honest dialogue between religion and science. This includes the incorporation of climate studies, astronomy and the process of evolution. This gives a certain credibility to their approach for some, whilst others might still find this challenging and unbiblical. Though the danger does exist to dwell closely towards paganism and natural religion, it is important to note that this approach does hold merit and forms part of a wider environmental movement.

Secondly, many of the above-mentioned authors engages a lot with traditional and indigenous religions. Whilst some might have argued these religions and societies to be primitive in the past, these authors uncover the richness of their traditions and practices. Often there is a strong emphasis on the interdepend nature of all things and a connection with the Earth. Could these traditions hold a lot more value for the institutional church? Furthermore, what would the impact be if these sources were more widely recognised in South African ecotheology? Themes like the Nguni term *Ubuntu* (I am because we are) and language like isiZulu greeting *Saubona* (I see you) are some small examples of this in South African context.[49] It can be seen as a shortcoming of this study to not have engaged more African theologians and studies on African traditional religions. The contributions of these age-old traditions must not – and cannot – be overlooked.

4.4. Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to look at different organisations, movements, theologies and theories that have all engaged with the environmental crisis in search of alternative lifestyles and responses. It is hoped that reflections on other organisations and traditions might awaken new discussions and deeper dialogue within the DRC. Furthermore, that these engagements could in some way inspire or invigorate a fresh outlook and a more spirituality that is more conscious of the whole creation.

This was done by firstly looking at local organisations that have attempted to react in a practical manner, addressing social and environmental challenges at grassroot level. These examples have shown that the environmental crisis can (and must) be also

[49] Or academic contributions by an author like Vellem (2014:2) – as mentioned in chapter 3.

addressed on a micro level in communities. This section had more to do with praxis, whilst also having a closer look at these organisations' embodied philosophy, vision and goals.

Secondly this chapter reviewed selected themes, models, theologies and language that embody a search for deeper spiritualities in response to the environmental crisis. These contributions were selected to illustrate different ways in which common themes of environmental ecotheology – like interconnectedness and interdependence – can be incorporated into spiritualities that bring about deep change. These contributions are not from within the Reformed traditions, thus hoping that the process of exploring other faith traditions and approaches might awaken new and creative imagination and innovation as the DRC embarks on its own environmental pilgrimage. The hope is that such an approach does not isolate the denomination within its own traditions and practices but get exposure to a diversity of other methods and worldview. These contributions have also been authors and concepts that have been reflected on by local academics both within the DRC and the South African context, making them important conversation partners.

Taking this approach now enables the study to move to some concluding remarks in its survey of environmental ecotheology within the DRC. By looking at past traditions, contemporary contributions, partnering organisations and reflections within the leadership of the DRC leadership, this study will now offer some concluding remarks, possible pitfalls and shortcomings, while also highlighting possibilities for further studies.

Chapter 5: Study findings and conclusion

5.1. Introduction

The aim of this study was to gain a clearer understanding of the ecotheological landscape within the DRC. Chapter one outlined this task as complex; engaging with different and interceding topics. The complexity of it required an insight and sensitivity for the local South African context, whilst embodying an awareness for the way in which historical events and theological contributions have shaped the denomination's theology and practice.

Chapter two attempted to more closely define the discipline of ecotheology by looking at common themes and attributes. This was done by rooting the conversation in reflections of historical contributions in creation theology within certain periods and contexts. This not only helped the study gain a deeper understanding of theologies and worldviews that have influenced Reformed and global thought, but also introduced common themes that contemporary ecotheologies engage with.

Having a more holistic awareness off historical contributions, the study shifted to the current context of the DRC as situated with contemporary South Africa. By highlighting contributions of South African scholars, the study emphasises the deeply embedded inequality and poverty of South African citizens. The contributions of Steve De Gruchy (2007: 333) outlined an approach towards and Olive Agenda that tried to look at the environmental crisis holistically; situating South Africa within a global context of imbalance and injustice. One cannot get a better understanding of the DRC's response to the environmental crisis, if one does not adequately situate the denomination within this landscape. This approach aided the study to deeper understand the DRC's response by focussing particularly on the denomination's leadership and highest level of organisational structure – the DRC General Synod.

Having outlined how the synod has engaged with the environmental crisis in the past, chapter four moves to investigate how others have responded. By looking at religious organisations that the DRC has partnered with before, one can gain a lot of insight into sustainable responses that are practice-orientated and bring the environmental discourse into the lives of everyday citizens. Looking outside the confines of the denomination – also the Reformed tradition – opens up creative possibilities for

innovative engagements with environmental issues at grassroot level. By highlighting metaphors, models and language that has the potential to challenge perceptions and worldviews, this study reflected on the need to engage with different voices and perspectives.

The aim of this final chapter will be to firstly, review the research problem and research questions that have been outlined in chapter one. This will be followed by a review of possible contributions and relevance of this study. The study will then draw to a close by outlining some of its limitations and possible areas for further research.

5.2. Review of research problem and questions

5.2.1. Primary research question

What is the current landscape of an ecological theology within the Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa?

Answering this question is complex. It would be a monumental task to adequately and completely answer this question in a denomination with such diverse opinions and multitude of congregations. However, after closer investigation this study would like to propose some outlines.

Firstly, there is an environmental awareness within the DRC's General Synod. This awareness has been displayed on numerous occasions and has made its way onto the agenda of the church. This engagement at the denomination's highest level has led to the beginnings of an articulation and formation of an ecotheology within the church. An important example of this can be found in the church's interaction with the Accra Confession in 2007 and even more so in the 2013 document "Ter Wille van die Aarde en Haar Bewoners", as well as the "green synod" of 2015. It would seem that the framework document (2013) in particular could be argued as a catalyst that has led to a subsequent engagement with environmental issues at every General Synod meeting since.

Secondly, ecotheologies are alive and making important scholarly contributions through theologians within the Reformed tradition, but also by academics that have been linked to the DRC (and its family). These include names like Ernst Conradie, Juanita Greyvenstein, Christo Lombard, Mary-Anne Plaaitjies-Van Huffel, Nadia

Marais and others. The most noteworthy of these being Conradie who has made an international contribution and is world-renowned in the field of ecotheology and ethics. Though there is a need for more academic engagement on the discipline from within the DRC, these scholars have made exceptional contributions, laying the foundations for further research.

Thirdly, it must be noted that though it is hard to get a precise indication of ecotheological engagements in congregations as a whole, there are considerable engagements in the different regional synods. One such example is the Ecological Project Team (also known as the Green Team) that falls under the joint DRC/URCSA Witness Ministry of the Western Cape Synod.[50] Many such projects can be found in different synodical levels and these efforts should be noted although they can't all be named here.

Lastly, one finds an engagement with ecotheological issues and themes in the church's different media platforms. This is best seen in the engagement with environmental concerns in the denomination's official newspaper *Die Kerkbode*. Regular articles by a variety of authors all play a part in forming an ecotheological consciousness within the DRC. Also worth mentioning is the weekly electronic newsletter called *Vrydagnuus*. The *Vrydagnuus* is distributed by the DRC's Western Cape Synod but reaches a reader base that stretches beyond to province to many people across the country. The newsletter has contained a weekly section dealing with environmental matters for years and continues to make an effort by sharing information and engaging the crisis in a practical manner.

There is much more to be said about all of these points. Further discussion on these themes are to follow later in this chapter.

5.2.2. Secondary research question

Chapter one has outlined four secondary questions to give further form to the study. This section will briefly discuss these.

[50] This only serves as a single example of different projects across the country as part of regional synods within the denomination. Prominent persons like Nadia Marais, Junita Greyventein and David Botha have been associated with this team (Botha, 2016). Website: http://getuienis.christians.co.za/ekologie/.

What are the main theological streams in the Reformed tradition when it comes to an ecological theology and what has its impact been on the theology within the Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa?

This is a difficult question to answer. One would have to go deeper into the denomination's theological heritage to truly answer this question. What this study can however start to formulate is that one could argue that the church is battling (along with any institutionalised Christian churches globally) an overwhelmingly anthropocentric worldview and understanding of the Bible and God. Main concerns within the church still have to do with concepts of salvation and sin. Could this theological heritage be part of a much wider cultural heritage that includes histories of imperialism, colonialism and a mostly Western-centred perspective on world history? Furthermore, could one make the case that these underlying tension have not been adequately highlighted or fully addressed? Might one be so bold as to connect these theological tensions to how the church speaks and think about nature? These are questions that deserve more reflecting in further studies.

Who are some of the main theological voices present in the discussion over the environmental crisis and the church's role in the South African context?

This study has shared a variety of contributions from different authors and theological streams within the South African context. These include a diversity of perspectives all focussing on different aspects on the environmental crisis and the effects thereof. Judging the validity or impact of contributing voices should be done with caution. Being aware of the dangers of oversimplification and generalisations this study would like to highlight a few offerings which could be believed to have contributed to the ecotheological discourse in South African context. One could argue the following authors appear in scholarly works, books and reports frequently. They have either contributed or their work has been engaged within the South African discourse. These include local authors and organisations, but also foreign scholars. These could roughly be grouped in the following categories (in no particular order) to help paint a clearer picture. It must however be noted that this is not a normative list but rather a schema that helps make sense of the material and is not all-encompassing. Others may argue different groupings, but these are made here to aid the current discussion.

Systematic theology, ethics and ecclesiology: Many would propose that the leading voice in the section has to be Ernst Conradie. Having collaborated and offered contributions on an international level, his work is widely referenced and engaged with. He is also well known outside of academic circles, most notably within the DRC and its networks. Another prominent voice that is worth mentioning is Larry Rasmussen whose work enjoys much engagement. References could also be made to the contributions of Nadia Marais (2011 & 2017), Mary-Anne Plaaitjies-Van Huffel (2017) and Bedford Strohm (2011).

Development theology, missiology and public theology: Steve De Gruchy's work an Olive Agenda is worth mentioning here. Though his work still offers more room for engagement after his tragic passing in 2010. Also, interactions with his work by Beverly Haddad (2015), Brian Konkol (2015) and other scholars offers possibility for further conversation.

Globalisation, justice and black theology of liberation: Allan Boesak's work (2009 & 2010) has been influential in setting a foundation for interaction. Others that have made important contributions have been authors like Vuyani Vellem (2014). The influence of confession documents like the Accra Confession, the Belhar Confession and the Kairos document also deserves mention here.

Feminist theology and contributions in deep ecology: UNISA academic Annalet van Schalkwyk (2008) with her focus on Deep Ecology and *Oikos* cycle have been an important and influential feminist voice. Maybe even more noteworthy is the work of Sallie McFague (1993 & 2008) whose contributions are widely cited and engaged in the South African conversation on the environmental crisis.

Communities, organisations and movements: Arguably different from the above-mentioned contributions, many organisations operate and engage the environmental crisis in the public sphere. These organisations play an important role in awareness, policy making, social pressure and in giving agency to local communities. There are many, but these have been discussed in this study: The Green Anglicans and Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute (SAFCEI). Other organisations not discussed in this study due to limited space and scope are the Network of Earthkeeping Christian Communities in South Africa (NECCSA) and also A Rocha.

Many more have been part of the conversation that has sadly not been mentioned here. There is a growing number of organisations and scholars engaging with environmental matters that are informing a new generation of people to take up the challenge of the environmental crisis.

What impact does the socio-economic context in South Africa have on the discussion around ecological ethics and the environmental crisis?

Chapter three of this study took ample time to engage with the social and economic context of South Africa. The conclusion of this has been that the context (present and historical) has an unquestionable impact on the country's capacity to fight the environmental crisis. Because of the country's chequered history of colonialism, injustice, inequality, oppression and racism, one cannot speak of the environment without engaging these issues first. Should this not be a non-negotiable step in any responsible ecotheological engagement in the South African context? Yet, some would argue that many do not treat this with the attention and sensitivity needed. The DRC itself has a long way to go in engaging these matters and honestly dealing with its own past contribution to these atrocities.

The importance of an integrated understanding of environment (Conradie, 2006:12) not only sees the environment holistically but aids in navigating ecotheology in South Africa. This understanding helps one incorporate green and brown environmental concerns. It is also worth mentioning that a great deal more energy (and education) is needed to de-Westernise/de-colonise engagements with history (or as Vellem (2017:1) puts it "Un-think the West"). Unfortunately, the very Europe-centredness of theology and history addressed here can also clearly be seen in this study (especially in chapter two).

Another concern while engaging environmental matters in South Africa is its local economy, governance and its possession the global market. These are also connected to the above-mentioned remarks on colonialism. Addressing the environmental crisis from the perspective of an economy that is in a process of maturation, poses unique challenges compared to matured economies. Issues of energy supply, food security and water access raise uncomfortable questions on the sustainability of the country's response to the environmental crisis that must be noted. This has a huge impact on public discourse on environmental matters.

What shortcomings, inadequacies, and opportunities, are identifiable through a critical theological reflection on the current state of DRC ecotheologies?

This study has situated the DRC in its particular context and attempted to survey its response to the environmental crisis and reflect on the state of ecotheologies within the denomination. This was done by analysing its interaction with themes of environmental crisis in the General Synod, whilst also engaging with theologies that influences the possible development of ecotheology in the denomination. This was done in such a way that attempted to balance these perspectives by also engaging noteworthy contributions of ecotheology from outside the tradition. In reviewing the above-mentioned question, this study would like to share the following thoughts.

Before further reflection it must be noted at the offset that the DRC has done well in penning an official response to environmental issues (most notably in the 2013 framework document). Not only has the General Synod engaged with challenges in relation to the environmental crisis but has done so in a well-articulated and ecotheological versed manner. The creation of a framework document and subsequent engagements with the subject matter at synod meetings should be commended and not overlooked. These contributions are noteworthy and are due to the hard work and diligence of those involved. However, the findings of the study point to the fact that there is more to be said on the matter.

Firstly, it could be argued that one of the biggest challenges – if not the most important one – is the design of the denomination's organisational structures. The DRC seems to be a victim of its own design here. Though environmental issues have been raised and discussed at the General Synod, the synod only convenes every four years (barring a special synod like in 2016). Therefore, four years pass between decisions, conversations and further engagement. One could argue that four years is a long time in the scheme of the environmental crisis, where consciousness on the subject is growing rapidly. The intent to honestly reflect on the environmental crisis and actively build an embodied ecotheology within the denomination is seriously impeded by this.

Secondly, ecotheological matters and environmental issues enjoy proportionately very little attention on the agenda compared to other issues at General Synod meetings. In most cases a task team is mandated to do research or address the issues and give feedback to the synod. I would like to argue that this raises the alarm in respect to how

serious the denomination really is about engaging in ecotheological matters. In the last General Synod meeting, the report from the ecology project team spanned over only eight pages on the agenda (NGK-AS, 2019:304-311), the most for an ecology agenda point in any General Synod agenda. This makes up only 1,5% of the total 529 pages of the 2019 General Synod agenda. Though one must not be haste in making deductions on basis of a page allocation, it does leave one with questions about the true intent of the DRC in really engaging these issues. Is the DRC really serious in truly embodying an Earth-honouring faith and an active ecotheology? Or differently put, is the DRC really on a journey in search of an ecotheological reform?

Thirdly, because of the above-mentioned reflections there is a real opportunity to address these issues and make a meaningful contribution as a whole denomination. One could ask questions about the denominations structure and operational design. Does the way in which the DRC's structure operate impede its ability to embody an ecotheological ethic as part of its DNA? Could one argue that the DRC's engagement with environmental issues and ecotheology have not universally succeeded in bearing practical fruit? Is it simply a case of much being said and not so much done, or is there more to it? How do the discussions at synod level manifest in local congregations and what is being done to educate and empower leaders to further cultivate environmental reflection and action locally? It seems as though ecotheology is not yet a truly transforming movement within the ethos of the denomination. A great opportunity exists if the denomination is to shift its approach and give agency to the local church in these matters. The DRC has the potential to make a deepfelt impact in communities across the country if they heed the invitation to true and lasting ecotheological reform.

5.3. Review of contribution and relevance of the study

Within the growing global consciousness over the effects of climate change and ecological destruction, it has become more relevant than ever to address the environmental crisis. Therefore, this study is relevant to the current discussions in the public sphere, but also in relation to a growing number academic and scholarly contributions in ecotheology. As the effects of the environmental crisis become more prevalent and the consequences of human domination over the environment become more obvious, these engagements are becoming a bigger part of global theological discourse.

Herein lies the relevance of this study's contribution. This study engages ecotheological matters in a way that is relevant to the South African context and in particular to the DRC. The contribution of this study is a critical reflection on the current landscape of ecotheologies in the DRC. It helps situate the DRC within a broader context of early theological thought, whilst connecting it to current and contextual reflections on contemporary ecotheology. It also analyses the DRC engagement with various ecotheologies and its response to the environmental crisis. This study argues that such a survey of the ecotheologies within the DRC has not been done before in this way. Therefore, this study is a relevant addition to the ecotheological discourse in the Reformed tradition and wider South African context. It has the potential to be an aid for further studies and engagements when engaging ecotheologies within the DRC.

5.4. Limitations and areas of further research

This study offers a contribution that aims to educate, invigorate and awaken new dialogue on ecotheologies within the DRC. Stimulating new discussions and further studies might aid in incubating a new and meaningful ecological reform within the denomination. This study should however be read and understood within its limitations.

5.4.1. Limitations

Firstly, this study mainly aims to focus on engaging with the DRC in particular. It is therefore not an all-encompassing survey of ecotheologies in South Africa. This and the fact that this thesis has been completed in partial requirement of a master's in theology limits the scope and capacity of the study to engage with a wider field of theologies and contributions in a just manner.

Secondly and building of the first statement, the study is written to engage some of the primary conversation partners of a particular group of Christians in a particular setting. Hence, the reader will note that it is largely presented from a white European and male dominated perspective. The history that has been discussed and the theologies this study has drawn upon encompasses a very European-centred perspective on history. This study has therefore unfortunately not integrated a worldview or perspective that adequately includes narratives from more diverse

backgrounds like indigenous African theologies and alternative perspectives on history and ecotheology. It is the intention of the author to do this important work in the next study which aims to bring a constructive contribution (beyond that of this critically analytical survey).

Thirdly, the study was limited on its reference point in articulating the landscape of ecotheologies within the DRC. Because of the diversity and variety of theologies and approaches that vary in each congregation, surveying the state of ecotheologies in a specific local context is not possible in this study. The choice was made to analyse the General Synod as the main leadership structure of the denomination, but focus could not be placed on regional synods and other factions of the denomination. The fact that every congregation has its own expression within the framework of the denomination emphasises the limitation of this study. It is also hoped that this will be addressed in future research.

Fourthly, this study is a qualitative theologically critical literature survey. The study is therefore limited in observing materials and sources in aiding its goal. Not being an empirical quantitative survey limits the scope of conclusions that can be made in this study. The choices and conclusions that are made in this study are also reflective of the research journey that the researcher undertook. It should be noted that other persons will naturally approach this topic in other ways, and their findings would be equally important and valid. As such, this study does not claim to be all-encompassing. Rather, it aims to add one more contribution to a very important subject field.

5.4.2. Further research

This study would like to propose possible areas that could enjoy further study and research.

Firstly, more research could be done into the connection between ecotheology and praxis within the DRC. It could be helpful to gain a better understanding of how the DRC can foster an ecotheological ethic that can cross the bridge between its leadership structures and local congregations. Further investigation could also be done concerning valuable partnerships and networks that actively engage and challenge the DRC in its ecotheological journey.

Secondly, many systematic theological questions within the Reformed framework have not been adequately unpacked yet. Themes like sin and salvation are key elements with the theology of the DRC. One could argue that before these themes are not unpacked in a sufficient manner, the DRC will continue to neglect creation in its life, liturgy and worship. True ecological reform will never transform the ethos of the denomination if these issues go unaddressed.

Thirdly, deeper focus is needed on un-thinking the West when doing ecotheology in South African context. Integrating alternative voices that are not European or white (and male) centred might aid in bringing important paradigms shifts. Part of this is further investigation into alternative images, rituals, celebrations and liturgical elements that could introduce new voices into the ecological discourse and might have value for future contributions.

Lastly, one could argue that images like Steve de Gruchy's Olive Agenda hold further unlocked potential relevant to the local context. Connecting this on a deeper level with an integrated approach to environment holds promise for ecotheology in South Africa.

5.5. Conclusion

It must be noted that the DRC is part of a context and time where a wider environmental movement is gaining momentum. Authors like Taylor (2010:207) speak of this growing energy and urges that it needs to spread with such ferocity that he calls it a "social epidemic". The image of epidemic is given new vividness in the context of the current COVID-19 pandemic raging in societies across the Earth. One could argue that the pandemic is exposing inequalities and injustices that where already issues before this crisis. The recent turn of events has put the limelight on these shortcomings within human societies globally. If one is to be as bold as to draw the comparison, I propose that ecotheology also does this in a way. It reflects on the current problems, looks to uncover its deep roots and origins, and then carefully – with creativity and an eschatological hope – moves to rethink and reform thoughts and actions as believers in Christ. Ecotheology has to with transformation. This transformation invigorates and energises believers to seek just relationships with God, humans and all of creation. It seeks an embodied faith and spirituality that honestly reflects on every aspect of human existence.

Given the enormity of the global environmental crisis, there is a need to cultivate conversations and spaces to address these issues. This is also true for the DRC, which has the capacity to bring about important change in the South African context. This study attempted to be a single contribution of many to better understand the landscape of ecotheology within the DRC, in the hope that it encourages others to stand up and embody an Earth-honouring faith, deep-rooted spirituality and an alternative way of life.

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Addendum A

Year	Frequency	Precise reference in document by page number
1962	0	
1966	0	
1970	0	
1974	0	
1978	0	
1982	0	
1986	0	
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2004	4	12, 46, 50, 216
2007	6	71, 94, 105, 366, 370, 434
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2013	19	4, 14, 20, 124, 125, 203, 212, 216, 216, 216, 216, 216, 217, 217, 217, 233, 248, 275, 276
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2019	44	3, 17, 35, 37, 38, 38, 42, 42, 53, 60, 61, 61, 70, 70, 146, 161, 227, 234, 304, 304, 304, 304, 304, 304, 304, 304, 304, 305, 305, 305, 305, 305, 306, 309, 310, 310, 310, 310, 310, 310, 310, 310, 311, 311

Table – Addendum A: The page locations of the word "ekologie" as used in the agendas of the General Synod of the DRC.